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A RIGHTED WRONG.

A RIGHTED WRONG.

A Nobel.

BY

EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF

'BLACK SHEEP,' 'THE FORLORN HOPE,' 'BROKEN TO HARNESS,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

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A RIGHTED WRONG.



CHAPTER I.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

‘GOOD-BYE, again; good-bye!’

‘Good-bye, my dear; perhaps not for ever, though: I may make my way back to the old country once more. You will tell my old friend I kept my word to him;’ and then the speaker kissed the woman to whom he addressed these parting words tenderly, went quickly away, and was hidden from her in a moment by all the bewildering confusion of ‘board ship’ at the hour of sailing.

He had not waited for words in reply to his farewell; she could not have spoken them, and he knew it; and while she tried to make out his figure among the groups upon the deck, formed of those who were about to set forth upon the long perilous ocean voyage, and those who had come to bid them good-bye, some with hearts full of agony, a few careless and gay enough, a suffocating silence held her.

But when at length she saw him for one brief moment as he went over the side to the boat waiting to take him to the shore so long familiar to her, but already, under the wonderful action of change, seeming strange and distant, the spell was lifted off her, and a deep gasping sob burst from her lips.

A very little longer, and the boat, with its solitary passenger, was a speck upon the water; and then she bowed her head,

unconsciously, and slightly waved her hand, and went below.

There was no one person in all the crowd upon the deck of the good ship Boomerang sufficiently disengaged from his or her own cares to take any notice of the little scene which had just passed—only one amid a number in the great drama which is always being acted, and for which a ship with its full complement of passengers, at the moment of beginning a long voyage, is a capacious and fine theatre. Selfishness and self-engrossment come out strongly in such a scene, and are as excusable under such circumstances as they ever can be.

She was quite alone in the little world of the ship; in the great world of England, to which she was going, she might find herself alone too, for who could say what tidings might await her there? in the inner

world of her heart she was still more surely and utterly alone. In the slight shiver, in the forlorn glance around, which had accompanied her gesture of farewell to the man who had escorted her on board, there was something expressive of a suddenly deepened sense of this solitude.

In the cabin, which she shared with her maid only, she found this sole and newly-selected companion making such preparation as she could for the comfort of her mistress. The girl's face was kind and pleasant and handsome; but the sight of it did not lessen the sense of her solitude to Margaret Hungerford, for the kind and handsome face was also strange.

Rose Moore, whom she had engaged to act as her servant during the voyage, was an orphan girl, who wished to return to Ireland to her 'friends,' as the Irish people, with striking inaccuracy of speech and

touching credulity, designate their relatives.

When Margaret Hungerford had lain down upon the little crib, which was to serve her for a bed during a period which would sound appalling in duration in the ears of a world so much accelerated in everything as our world of to-day is, she thought of Rose Moore, and of the difference between her own position and that of the girl who was to be her companion.

‘She is going home to friends,’ she thought, ‘to a warm welcome, to a kindly fireside, and she is bringing money with her to gild the welcome, to gladden the hearth; while I—I am returning alone—O, how utterly alone!—and destitute—ah, how destitute!—I, to whom not even the past is left; I, who do not possess even the right to grieve; I, to whom life has been only a mistake, only a delusion. I

am returning to a home in which I was regarded rather as a trouble than anything else in my childhood, and which I was held to have disgraced in my girlhood. Returning to it, to feel that the judgment I set aside, the wisdom I derided, was right judgment and true wisdom, and that the best I can hope is to keep them from ever finding out how terribly right they were. The only real friend I now possess I am leaving behind me here; and I am glad it is so, because he knows all the truth. Surely no one in the world can be more lonely than I.'

Margaret Hungerford lay quietly in her narrow bed, while the ship resounded with all the indescribable and excruciating noises which form a portion of the tortures of a sea-voyage.

She did not suffer from them, nor from the motion. She was tired, too tired in

body and mind to care about discomfort, and she did not dislike the sea. So she lay still, while Rose Moore moved about in the little space allotted to the two, and which she regarded as a den rather than a 'state-room,' looking now and then curiously at her mistress, whom she had not had much previous opportunity of observing.

The girl looked at a face which was not less remarkable for its beauty than for its expression of weariness and sorrow, at a figure not more noticeable for its grace and suppleness than for the languor and listlessness which every movement betrayed.

Margaret Hungerford was tall, but not so tall as to be remarked for her height; and her figure, rounded and lithe, had still much of the slightness of girlhood remaining. Her face was not perfect; the fore-

head was too high and too heavy for ideal beauty; there was not enough colour in the clear pale cheek; there was not enough richness in the outline of the delicate mouth. Her face was one in which intellect ruled, and thus its beauty served a master which is pitiless in its exactions, and wears out the softness and the fineness and the tinting in a service which is not gentle.

But it was a beautiful face for all that, more than beautiful for those who looked beyond the deep dark colouring of the large gray eyes, deep-set under the finely-marked brows; who looked for the spirit in their light, for the calm and courage which lent them the limpid placid beaming which was their ordinary characteristic. It was not a perfect face; but it had that which very few perfect faces possess—the capacity for expressing feeling, intelligence, the nobler passions, and utter forgetfulness of self.

To look at Margaret Hungerford was to feel that, however faulty her character might be, it at least was noble, and to know that vanity had no share in an organisation which had no place for anything small, whether good or evil. It was a magnanimous resolute face—not strong, in any sense implying roughness, hardness, or self-assertion, but evincing a large capacity of loving and working and suffering.

And she had loved and worked and suffered. The bloom that was wanting to her pure fair cheek, which touched too faintly and grudgingly her small, well-curved, but ascetic lips, had vanished from her heart as well; the slight white fingers, too thin for beauty,—though the hands, clasped over her breast as she lay still with closed eyes, were curiously small and perfectly shaped,—had been unsparingly used in many and various kinds of toil in

the new land, which had been wild and rough indeed when she had come there.

The girl looked at her admiringly, and with a sort of pity, for which she had no reason to give to herself except that her mistress was a widow. Explanation enough, she would have said, and naturally; and still, there was something in the face which Rose Moore felt, in her untaught, instinctive, but very acute fashion, had been there longer than three months, which was the exact period since Mrs. Hungerford's husband had died.

Who was she going to? she thought; and did she like going home? and what was she leaving behind? Not her husband's grave, the girl knew, and felt the knowledge as an Irish peasant would feel it. No, she had not even that consolation; for her husband, who had been a member of one of the earliest-formed exploring

parties who had undertaken to investigate the capacities of the unknown new continent, had been killed in the Australian bush. It was better not to think what the fate of his remains had been, better that it was not known.

What, then, was this pale young widow, who looked as though her sorrow far antedated her weeds, leaving behind her? Rose Moore was not destined to know. What was she going to? the girl wondered. In the short time she had been with her, Mrs. Hungerford's kindness had been accompanied with strict reserve, and Rose had learned no more than that she was returning, probably, to her father's home; but of even that she was not certain.

Thus the 'lone woman' seemed pitiable to the gay and handsome Irish girl, and the thought of it interfered with her visions of 'home,' and her exultation in the money

she had to take thither, and the love she was going to find.

Pitiable indeed she was.

As the long low banks of Port Phillip faded from the sight of the passengers on board the 'homeward bound,' not a heart among the number but yearned with some keen and strong regret, too keen and strong to be overborne by the gladness of hope and the relief of having really begun the long voyage. Not a heart, not even that of Margaret Hungerford; for she had looked her last on the land where she had left her youth, and all its dreams and hopes; where love had died for her, and truth had failed; where she had been rudely awakened, and had never again found rest.

At such a time, at such a crisis in life, retrospection is inevitable, however undesirable; however painful and vain, it must be submitted to. The mind insists on pass-

ing the newly-expired epoch in review; in repeating, in the full and painful candour of its reverie, all the story so far told; in returning to the old illusions, and exposing their baselessness; in summoning up the defeated hopes, which, gauged by the measure of disappointment, appear so unreasonable—weighed in the balance of experience, seem so absurd.

Can I ever have been such a fool as to have believed that life held such possibilities? is the question we all ask at such times; and the self-contempt which inspires it is only as real, and no more, as the pain which no scorn or wonder can decrease.

So, like one performing an enforced task, with what patience it is possible to command, but wearily, and longing for the end, and for release, Margaret Hungerford, during the early days of the long voyage

from Australia to England, gazed into her past life as into a mirror, and it gave her back a succession of images, of which the chief were these which follow.

CHAPTER II.

PAGES FROM THE PAST.

THE woman who was now returning to her native land after a long and painful exile looked back, in her retrospective fancy, upon a home which had external beauty, calm, and comfort to recommend it. She was the daughter of a gentleman named Carteret, a man of small but independent fortune, and whose tastes, which had been too extensively and exclusively cultivated for the happiness of his son and daughter, led him to prefer a life of quietness and seclusion, in which he devoted himself to study, and to the pursuit of natural history in particular.

Mr. Carteret, who is an old man now, might have been the original of 'Sir Thomas the Good,' whose wife, 'the fair Lady Jane,' displayed such becoming resignation on his death. Mr. Carteret, like the worthy knight, 'whose breath was short, and whose eyes were dim,' would 'pore for an hour over a bee or a flower, or the things that come creeping out after a shower;' but he was sadly blind to the subtle processes of the human heart in the development of the human beings under his own roof, which were taking place around him.

He had lost his wife very soon after the birth of his daughter, and when his son was three years old; and within little more than a year, a resolute young woman, who had long made up her mind that a pretty little country place within easy distance of London,—for Mr. Carteret lived in Reigate,—a fair position in the 70

county society, and a comfortable income, were desirable acquisitions, married him.

People said Miss Martley made all the preliminary arrangements, including even the proposal, herself; and though that statement was probably exaggerated, there can be little doubt that the suggestion, that it would be an advisable and agreeable circumstance that Miss Martley should become Mrs. Carteret, originated with the lady.

She was rather young, and rather pretty; and there really was not so much to be said against the match, except by Mr. Carteret's servants, who naturally did not like it. They liked it still less when the new mistress of the establishment, emulating the proverbial new broom, swept them all away, and replaced them by domestics of her own selection.

The novel state of things was not a

happy condition for Mr. Carteret. He was a gentle-natured man, indifferent, rather cold, and indolent, except where his particular tastes were concerned; he pursued his own avocations with activity and energy enough, but his easy-going selfishness rendered him a facile victim to a woman who managed him by the simple and effectual expedient of letting him have his own way undisturbed, in one direction,—that one the most important to him,—and never consulting his opinion or his wishes in any other respect whatever.

Mr. Carteret might spend time and money on ‘specimens,’ on books, and on visits to naturalists and museums; he might fill his own rooms with stuffed monkeys and birds, and indulge in the newest form of cases for impaled insects, and even display very ghastly osteological trophies if he pleased; his wife in nowise molested

him. But here his power was arrested—here his freedom stopped. Mrs. Carteret ruled in everything else; and he knew it, and he suffered it ‘for the sake of a quiet life.’ He had a conviction that if he tried opposition, his life would not be quiet; therefore he never did try opposition.

The new Mrs. Carteret did not actually ill-treat the children of the former Mrs. Carteret; she only neglected them—neglected them so steadily and systematically that never was she betrayed into accidentally taking them, their interests or their pleasure, into consideration in anything she chose to do or to leave undone.

The servants understood quickly and thoroughly that if they meant to retain their places they must keep the children from annoying Mrs. Carteret, from incommoding her by their presence, or intruding their wants upon her. They understood

as distinctly, that if this fact were impressed by any misplaced zeal upon the attention of Mr. Carteret, the imprudence would be as readily repaid by dismissal; and as they liked and valued their places,—for Mrs. Carteret, provided her own comfort was secured in every particular, was a liberal and careless mistress,—the imprudent zeal never was manifested.

Thus the two young children grew up, somehow, anyhow, well-fed and well-clothed, by the care of servants; but in every particular, apart from their mere animal wants, utterly neglected. People talked about it, of course; and just at first the neglect of her husband's children threatened to be a little detrimental to the popularity which Mrs. Carteret ardently desired to attain. But she gave pleasant garden-parties, at which neither husband nor children 'showed;' she dressed very well; she was very kind to

the young ladies of the neighbourhood who were still on their preferment; her well-trained household were discreetly silent; and she had no children of her own.

This last was readily accepted as a very valid excuse; no one thought of the total absence of wifely sympathy and womanly tenderness which the argument conveyed. Mrs. Carteret could not be expected to care about children—no one really did who had not children of their own ‘to arouse the instinct,’ as a foolish female, who fancied the phrase sounded philosophical, remarked. So the neighbourhood consented to forget Mr. Carteret’s children, and that contemplative gentleman consented to remember them very imperfectly, and things were very comfortable at Chayleigh for some years.

But Haldane and Margaret Carteret grew older with those years; the little children,

who had been easily stowed away in a nursery and a playroom,—judiciously distant from drawing-room, boudoir, and study,—were no longer of an age to be so disposed of. The boy must either be sent to school or have a tutor,—he and his sister had passed beyond the rule of the nursery governess,—the girl's education must be attended to.

The latter case was especially disagreeable to Mrs. Carteret. It forced upon her attention the fact that she was no longer in the first bloom of her youth. A rather young and rather pretty stepmother is capable of being made interesting, if the situation be judiciously treated; but Mrs. Carteret had never treated it judiciously, and now it could not avail.

She had nearly exhausted her *rôle* of young matronhood at thirty-seven, and Margaret was then twelve years old. True,

there would be a revival of its material pleasures, its gaieties and dissipations, when Margaret should be 'brought out;' but Mrs. Carteret found feeble consolation in the anticipation of the pleasures and importance of chaperonage. They can only be reflected at the best; and Mrs. Carteret cared little to shine with a borrowed light.

In the mean time, she had no notion of having a gawky girl, as she called Margaret in her thoughts, always about her at home, growing old enough to interfere, and perhaps to attract her father's attention unduly and put absurd ideas into his head. Margaret Carteret was not at all gawky; but even then, at the least beautiful period of life, gave promise of the grace and distinction which afterwards characterised her.

Mrs. Carteret made up her mind, and then informed her husband of the resolution she had taken, and the arrangements she

had made. He acquiesced, as he always did; and when Margaret, startled, confused, not knowing whether to be frightened at or pleased with the novelty which the prospect offered, asked him if it was really true that she was going to school at Paris, and was not to return for a whole year, he said placidly,

‘Certainly, my dear. Mrs. Carteret has arranged it all; and I have told her to be sure and ask the school people to take you to the Jardin des Plantes.’

Then Mr. Carteret, who never perceived that his daughter was no longer a baby, sent her away with a pat on the head, and turned his attention to investigating the structure of a ‘trap-door spider’s abode,’ which had reached him the day before, having been sent by a friend and fellow-naturalist from Corfu.

The education of Haldane Carteret had

been differently provided for. It chanced that the one human being besides herself for whom Mrs. Carteret entertained a sentiment of affection was her cousin, James Dugdale, a young man who had no chance of success in any active career in life, being deformed and in delicate health—anything but a desirable tutor for a delicate retiring boy, like Haldane Carteret, people said—a boy who needed encouragement and companionship to rouse him up and make him more like other boys. But Mrs. Carteret evinced her usual indifference to the opinion of ‘people’ on this occasion. She chose to provide for her cousin a mode of life suitable to his mental and physical constitution.

James Dugdale came to live at Chayleigh. The deformed young man had much of the talent, and all the unamiability, which so frequently accompany bodily malforma-

tion, and he inspired Margaret Carteret with intense dislike and repulsion — with admiration and some respect, too, child as she was ; for she soon recognised his talent, and succumbed to his influence. James Dugdale taught Margaret as much as he taught her brother ; he implanted in her the tastes which she afterwards cultivated so assiduously ; but the boy learned to love him, while the girl never faltered in her dislike. When she found her lessons easily understood and soon learned at school, she knew that she had to thank her stepmother's cousin—her brother's tutor—for the aid which had rendered them light to her ; but she never could bring herself to thank him in thought or word. The girl's heart was almost void of love and gratitude at this time of her life. She hardly could be said to love her father ; her stepmother she neither loved, hated, nor feared ; for her

brother alone were all her kindly feelings hoarded up. She loved him, indeed; and, next to that love, the strongest sentiment in her heart was dislike of James Dugdale.

Time passed on, and Margaret grew up handsome, with a strongly intellectual stamp upon her face, and, in her character, self-will and impulsiveness prevailing. She liked the Parisian school—for she ruled her companions, some by love, others by fear and the power of party—and she cared little for her home, where she could not rule any one.

Her father was not worth governing; her stepmother she treated with a studious and settled indifference, forming her manner on the model of that of Mrs. Carteret, but never attempting to gain any influence over that lady, who was, however, not without a misgiving at times that when Margaret should come home 'for good' she

might find it rather difficult to 'hold her own.' Holding her own, in Mrs. Carteret's case, rather implied holding every one else's, and that privilege she felt to be in danger. It was, therefore, with but a passing reflection on the fatal obstacle which such an occurrence must offer to her maintenance of the 'young married woman's' position in society, that Mrs. Carteret, when Margaret was fifteen, began to speculate upon the chances of getting Margaret 'off her hands,' when she should have finally left school, by an opportune marriage.

A year later, and, much to the surprise of his father, and indeed of every one who knew him except James Dugdale, Haldane Carteret proclaimed his wish and intention of entering the army. His father did not oppose; his stepmother and his tutor supported him in his inclination; the interest of a distant relative of his mother's was

procured; and thus it chanced that, when Margaret came home 'for good,' at a little more than sixteen years old, she found her brother in all the boyish pride and exultation of his commission and his uniform.

Then Margaret's fate was not long in coming. The first time her brother came home, and while she had as yet seen little of the society in which her stepmother moved, he brought a brother officer with him, a handsome young man, named Godfrey Hungerford, with whom he had contracted a friendship—the more enthusiastic because it was the first the lad had ever experienced.

And now active antagonism arose between Margaret Carteret and James Dugdale. The girl fell in love with the handsome young officer, whose bold and adventurous spirit pleased her; whose manifest admiration had a pardonable fascination for

her; who raised even her father to animation; and for whom Mrs. Carteret thought it worth while to put forth the freshest of her somewhat faded graces.

Haldane paraded and boasted of his friend according to the foolish hearty fashion of his time of life, and was delighted that his sister felt with him in this too.

But the ex-tutor, who, it appeared, was to remain a fixture at Chayleigh, conceived a profound distrust and dislike of the brilliant young man, whom he quietly observed from his obscure corner of the house—and of life indeed—and who had no notion of the scrutiny he was undergoing.

Was James Dugdale's penetration quickened by the hardly-veiled insolence of Godfrey Hungerford's manner to him—insolence which sometimes took the form of complete unconsciousness, and at others of an elaborate compassionate politeness? It may have

been so; at any rate, he made his observations closely, and, when the time came, he expressed their result freely.

The time came when Godfrey Hungerford asked Margaret to become his wife; and then James Dugdale, for the only time during his long residence in Mr. Carteret's house, spoke to that gentleman in private and in confidence.

‘Insist on time, at least,’ he urged upon Margaret’s father; ‘think how young she is; think how little you know of this man. You have no guarantee for his character but the praise of an enthusiastic boy. For the girl’s sake, insist on time; do not consent to less than a two years’ engagement; and then rouse yourself, and go to work as a man ought on whom such a responsibility rests, and find out all about this man before you suffer him to take your daughter away from her home—a girl, ignorant of

the world and of life, in love with her own fancy. I know Margaret's real nature better than you do, and I know she is incapable of caring for this man if she knew him as he really is. It is a delusion; if you can do no more, you can at least secure her time to find it out.'

'Find what out?' asked Mr. Carteret, fretfully; 'what do you know about Hungerford?—how have you found out anything?'

'I know nothing; I have not found out anything,' said James Dugdale. 'I wish I had, then my interference might avail, even with Margaret herself; but I have only my conviction to go upon, that this man is not fit to be trusted with a woman's happiness; that Margaret is not really attached to him; and, in addition, the suggestion of common sense, that she is much too young to be permitted to settle her own fate irrevocably.'

The latter argument seemed to have some weight with Mr. Carteret, and James Dugdale saw his advantage.

‘Do you think,’ he said, ‘if her mother were living, she would permit Margaret to marry at her present age? Do you think, if you knew you would have to account to her mother for your care of her, you would listen to such a thing?’

This reference to his dead wife was not pleasant to Mr. Carteret. He was growing old, and he had begun of late to think life, even when surrounded by specimens, and enlivened by numerous publications concerning the animal creation, rather a mistake. So he assented, hurriedly, to James Dugdale’s arguments, and the interview concluded by his promising to prevent Margaret’s marriage taking place for two years, when she would be nineteen.

But Mr. Carteret and James Dugdale

both knew that the real decision of that matter rested not with them, but with Mrs. Carteret, and that, if she decreed that Margaret should be married next week, married next week she inevitably would be. So the ex-tutor addressed himself to his cousin, with whom he adopted a different line of argument.

‘I know you don’t care about Margaret,’ he said; ‘but I do; and I know you admire Lieutenant Godfrey Hungerford, which I do not; but you care what people say of you, Sibylla, as much as any one, I know; and you will get unpleasantly talked about if the girl is allowed to marry, so young, a man whom you know little or nothing about, and who is a scoundrel, if ever there was one, or I am more mistaken than I generally am. Take care, Sibylla, your husband is notoriously under your guidance, and you will have to bear the blame

if this marriage takes place too soon; it is a serious thing, and you have never been a fond stepmother, you know.'

Mrs. Carteret loved her cousin, and feared him; she also had a great respect for his judgment; and he had gone to work with her in the right way. The result was satisfactory to the ex-tutor, who took himself to task concerning his own motives, but found no room for self-condemnation.

'If I could suppose for a moment,' he thought, 'that I am insincere in this thing—that I am actuated by any selfish feeling or hope regarding Margaret—I should hesitate; but I know I am not: my heart is pure of such self-deception; my brain has no such cobwebs of folly in it. Separated from him finally,—if I can contrive to part them,—held back from her fate for a while, by my means, at all events she will only dislike me the more. And my conviction

respecting this man,—is that prejudice?—is that an unjust dislike?—is it pique, because he has good looks, and grace, and good manners, and I have none of these? Is it spite, because he has been insolent to me when he dared, and, in a covert way, more insolent still, when these simple people did not understand him? No; I can answer to myself for single-mindedness in this matter. I might not have seen so plainly had not Margaret's happiness been at stake. But I do see; I do not only fancy. I do judge; I do not only imagine.'

So James Dugdale carried his point. Margaret resented his interference bitterly; she learned that his arguments had induced her stepmother to take the view to which her father had acceded; and she raged against him and denounced him as insolent, presuming, intolerable.

But she liked the idea of the long en-

gagement, too. She was romantic and imaginative, and her bright pure young heart—all given up to what was in reality a creation of her fancy, but in which she saw the dazzling realisation of her girlish dreams—was satisfied with the assurance of loving and being loved.

The presence of her lover was happiness, and his absence was hardly sorrow. Had she not his letters? Were there ever such letters? she thought; and while she exulted in all the delicious exclusiveness of the possession of such treasures, she almost longed that the world might know how transcendent a genius was this gallant soldier whom she loved.

She was glad that Godfrey felt so much disappointment at the delay; and the impertinence of any one who interfered to prevent the fulfilment of any wish of his, no words could adequately describe. But,

for all that, Margaret was extremely happy, though she did hate James Dugdale.

Her lover encouraged her in this feeling, and when he and her brother had rejoined their regiment she restricted her intercourse with the officious ex-tutor to the barest acknowledgment of his presence. James Dugdale took this mode of procedure calmly, and applied himself to the task of finding out all that was to be ascertained concerning the circumstances, character, and antecedents of Lieutenant Godfrey Hungerford.

CHAPTER III.

DISCOMFITURE.

WHEN the engagement between Godfrey Hungerford and Margaret Carteret had lasted six months, during which time James Dugdale had contrived to learn several facts to that gentleman's disadvantage, Haldane Carteret made his appearance unexpectedly at Chayleigh. Margaret's first look at her brother revealed to her quick instinctive fears that his errand had in it something unfriendly to her love. With all the selfishness which comes of an engrossing feeling, she was insensible to any other impulse of alarm.

Margaret was right ; her brother was

come to unsay all he had said of Godfrey Hungerford—to tell his father that he had been deceived in his friend—to try to undo the work he had helped to do.

‘He drinks and gambles, Margaret ; for God’s sake, don’t marry a man with such vices,’ said Haldane eagerly to his sister.

Her father roused himself, and warned her too ; but the girl was obdurate. She only knew of such things by name ; they had no meaning to her as terrible realities of life ; and then she had her lover’s letters—the priceless, charming, incomparable letters—and they told her that her brother had come round to Dugdale’s way of thinking, and had turned against him because he had interfered to keep him out of some boyish scrapes.

The strongest and most spurious of all arguments too, used to a loving foolish girl, were not wanting. If even he were

guilty of some follies, granting that he was not a perfect being, could he fail to become so under her influence—could he resist such perfection as hers, become the light and guidance of his home? It is needless to repeat the flimsy foolish strain of the arguments which bewildered and beguiled the girl. She met her father and her brother with vehement opposition, and replied to everything they urged, that she alone knew, she only understood Godfrey, and she was not going to forsake him to serve the turn of interested calumniators.

This taunt, aimed at the brother, did not hit the mark. He had not the least notion to what it referred. The young man spoke frankly and gently to the infatuated girl, lamented his own easy credulity which had at first betrayed his judgment, and finally left the matter in his father's hands, only entreating him to be firm, and to take

into consideration, in addition to what he had told him, certain circumstances which had come to the knowledge of James Dugdale. For himself, the pain of enforced association with his quondam friend would soon be at an end. The brigade of Royal Artillery to which he belonged was then under orders for Canada, and this was to be his farewell visit to his home.

The brother and sister parted, in sorrow on Haldane's part—in silent and sullen estrangement on Margaret's. The girl's heart was full of angry and bitter revolt, and of the keen indignation which inexperienced youth feels against those who strive to serve it against its will. They were trying to protect her from herself—to save her from the worst of evils—the most cruel of destinies; and she treated them as if they had been, as indeed she believed them to be, her worst enemies.

But they were not to succeed—Margaret was not to be saved. The girl's life at home—though no one molested her—though her father, if the matter were not pressed upon his attention, took no notice—though her stepmother was, as usual, coldly but civilly negligent of her—though James Dugdale maintained his inoffensive reserve—became intolerable to her; intolerable through its loneliness—intolerable by reason of its cross-purposes. The one thought, the one image, the one hope for which she lived was not only unshared, but condemned by those with whom she lived. The one name precious to her heart, delightful to her ears, was never spoken within her hearing—the little world she lived in ignored him who was all the world to her.

When Haldane Carteret had been three months in Canada, Godfrey Hungerford was

dismissed the service for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman ; and in another month, Margaret Carteret had clandestinely left her home, joined her lover, and become his wife.

The shock to her father was very severe. It was the first misfortune of his life, including his first wife's death, to which 'specimens' offered no alleviation. It was not an evil which brought finality with it ; and Mr. Carteret therefore found it difficult to bear. If Margaret had died, her father would have grieved for her, no doubt, but there would have been an end of it ; now, though no one could foresee or foretell the end, it was easy to prognosticate evil as the result, and impossible to hope for good.

Like all men of his sort, Mr. Carteret had a great horror of the openly violent and aggressive vices of men. He was in-

capable of understanding the amount of suffering to be inflicted upon women by the supineness, selfishness, indolence, imprudence, or eccentricity of their husbands and fathers; but the mere idea of a woman being in the power of a man who actually got drunk, lost or won money at cards or dice, used bad language, or had any stain of dishonesty on his name, was terrible to his harmless, if valueless, nature.

Mrs. Carteret was extremely indifferent. Of course it was an unpleasant occurrence, and people would talk unpleasantly about it; but she had never pretended to care much for, or interfere with, Miss Carteret, —and no one could blame her.

Of all those who had shared her life, who had seen her grow from childhood to girlhood, James Dugdale was the only one who had made Margaret Carteret's character a subject of close and loving

study—the only one who understood its strength and its weakness, its forcible points of contrast, its lurking dangers, its unseen resources. He knew her intellectual qualities, he knew her imaginativeness, and understood the danger which lurked in it for her—a danger which had already taken so delusive and fatal a form. With all the prescience of a calm and unselfish affection, he feared for the girl's future, and grieved as only mature wisdom and disinterested love can grieve over the follies and illusions, the inevitable suffering and disenchantment, of youth and wilfulness.

‘She has a dreadful life before her,’ said her misjudged and despised friend to himself, as he left Margaret's father, after the two had discussed the letter in which the misguided girl had informed him of her marriage; ‘a dreadful life, I fear, and

believe ; but, if she lives through it, and over it, and takes it rightly, she may be a noble and strong woman yet, though never a happy one.'

For some time Margaret Hungerford's communications with her family were brief and infrequent. She said nothing in her letters of happiness or the reverse, and she made no request to be permitted to revisit her former home. She never wrote to or heard from her brother.

After a while a formal application was made to Mr. Carteret by Mr. Hungerford for pecuniary assistance, as he had determined to try his fortune in Australia. To this Mr. Carteret replied that he would give Margaret half the small fortune which was to have been hers on his death, but required that it should be distinctly understood that she had nothing more to expect from him.

Mr. Carteret went up to London and drew the sum he had named, 500*l.*, out of the funds, and availed himself of that opportunity to make his will, by which he bequeathed to his son all his property, a life-interest in the greater part of which had been secured to his wife by settlement. This done, and provided with the money he had named, he went to see Margaret and her husband. The meeting was brief and final. Mr. Carteret returned on the following day to Chayleigh.

Godfrey Hungerford and his wife were to sail for Sydney in a fortnight, he told Mrs. Carteret, in reply to her polite but quite uninterested inquiries. Nor was he much more communicative to James Dugdale.

‘How does she look?’ he asked.

The father made no reply, but shook his head, and moved his hands nervously

among the papers on the table before him.

‘Already!’ said James Dugdale, when he had softly left the room, and then he went away and shut himself up alone.

CHAPTER IV.

THE IDEAL AND THE REAL.

IF it were possible to linger over the story of Margaret Hungerford's life—if other and later interests did not peremptorily claim attention—how much might be said concerning it? On the surface, it had many features in common with other lives; and the destruction of a fancy, the awaking to a truth, terrible and not to be eluded, is the least rare of mental processes. But the individual history of every mind, of every heart, has features unlike those of all others—features worthy, in even the humblest and simplest lives, of close scanning and of faithful reproduction. Margaret Hunger-

ford was not an ordinary person; she had strongly-pronounced intellectual and moral characteristics, and her capacity, whether for good or evil time and her destiny alone could tell, was great.

The very intensity of her nature, which had made it easy for her to be deceived, easy for her to build a fair fabric of hope and love on no sounder foundation than her fancy, made it inevitable that the truth should come with terrible force to her, and be understood in its fullest extent and in its darkest meaning—that most full of terror and despair.

The external circumstances of her life subsequent to her marriage did not affect Margaret Hungerford so much as might have been anticipated, in consideration of her delicate nurture, her previous life of seclusion, and her habitual refinement. She was destined to encounter many vicissi-

tudes, to endure poverty, hardship, uncertainty, solitude of the absolute kind, and of that kind which is still more unbearable—enforced companionship with the mean and base, not in position merely, but in soul.

She had to endure many actual privations—to do many things, to witness many scenes which, if they had been unfolded to her in the home of her girlhood, uncongenial as it had been, as probabilities lurking in the plan of the future, she would have merely regarded with unalarmed incredulity, would have put aside as things which never could have any existence.

But these things, when they came, she bore well—bore them with strength and patience, with quiet resolution and almost indifference, which, had there been any one to contemplate the girl's life, and study her character at that time, would have revealed

the truth that worse things than privation and hardship had come to her, and had rendered them indifferent to her.

Worse things had come. Knowledge and experience, which had outraged her pride and tortured her love, crushed her faith, scattered her hopes, and left her life a desert waste, whence the flowers of youth and trust had been uprooted, and which lay bare to be trampled under foot of invading foes.

Margaret's delusion had lasted so short a time after her marriage that the first feeling her discovery of the utter worthlessness of the man into whose hands she had committed her fate produced in her mind was dread and distrust of herself.

Was this fading away of love, this dying out of all respect, of all enthusiasm, this dreary hopelessness and fast coming disbelief in good, was all this inconstancy

on her part? Was she false to her own feelings, or had she mistaken them? Was she light and fickle, as men were said to be?

But this dread soon subsided: it could not long disturb Margaret's clear good sense. The fault was not hers; she was not inconstant, though she no longer loved Godfrey Hungerford. The truth was, she had never known him; there was no such person as her fancy had created and called by his name.

She had believed herself to be doing a fine heroic thing when she married a disgraced man, a man unjustly judged of his fellows, one against whom the world had set itself—why, she did not quite know, but probably from envy—and who therefore needed her love and fidelity more than a prosperous man could need them. It was a foolish, girlish, not unnatural de-

lusive notion of grandeur and self-sacrifice, and, added to the fascination exerted over her by Godfrey Hungerford's good looks and artistic love-making, it had hurried Margaret to her doom.

The girl married, as she believed, a hero, with a few follies perhaps, all to be forsworn and forsaken when she should be his, to guide and inspire every moment of his life, and whose unjust penalties her love was to render harmless. What did she not believe him to be! Brave, true, generous, devoted, clever, energetic, unworldly, poetical, high-minded, and pure—the ideal man who was to disprove those horrid sayings of disappointed persons, that the lover and the husband are very different beings, and that ‘man's love is of man's life a thing apart.’

They would prove it to be their ‘whole existence.’ Could any sacrifice be too

great to make for such a prize as this? No. The sacrifice was made by him. Who would not have loved and married Godfrey Hungerford? She did not believe that any one could be so bad as to believe the accusation brought against him by a low mean clique, a set of men who could not bear to know that he was cleverer at card-playing than they were—just as he was cleverer at anything else—and who did not know how to lose their money like gentlemen. Of course, as he never could be secured against meeting persons of the sort, it was much better that Godfrey should make up his mind, as he had done, never to touch a card after their marriage.

And then how great was his love for her! How delightful was the scheme of the future, according to his casting of it! So Margaret dreamed her dream, and when the waking came she blamed herself that

she could dream it no longer, and could not be lulled to sleep again.

Godfrey Hungerford has no place in this story, and there is no need to enter into details of the life he led, and condemned his wife to. He proved the exact reverse of all she had believed him. Base, mean, cowardly, in the sense of the cowardice which makes a man systematically cruel to every creature, human and brute, within his power, though ready to face danger for bravado's, and exertion for boasting's sake, or either for that of money—a liar, a gambler, and a profligate.

He laughed at her credulity when she quoted his promises to her, and ridiculed her amazement and disgust as ignorance of life, girlish folly, and squeamishness. In a fitful, 'worthless' sort of way, he liked and admired her to the end; but the truthfulness that was in her prevented Margaret

from taking advantage of this contemptible remnant of feeling to obtain easier terms of life. She had ceased to love him, and she never disguised the fact—she let him see it; when he questioned her, in a moment of maudlin sentiment, she told him so quite plainly; and her tyrant made the truthfulness which could not stoop to simulation a fresh cause of complaint against her.

What Margaret suffered, no words, not even her own, could tell; but the material troubles, the grinding anxieties of her life, deadened her sense of grief after a time. They were always poor. Money melted in the hands of her worthless, selfish husband. Sometimes he made a little, in some of the numerous ways in which money was to be made in colonial life, sometimes he was quite unemployed. He was always dissolute and a spendthrift.

It was hard training for Margaret, se-

vere teaching, and not more full of actual pain, privation, and toil than of bitter humiliation. They moved about from place to place, for at each Godfrey Hungerford became known and shunned.

Villany and vice were loud and rampant indeed in the New World then, as now; but he was not so clever as the superior villains, and not so low, not so irretrievably ruffianly, as the inferior ruffians, and it fell out, somehow, that he did not find any permanent place, or take any specific rank, among them. Of necessity, suffering, both moral and material, was his wife's lot, and it was wonderful that such suffering did not degrade, that it only hardened her. It certainly did harden her, making her cold, indifferent, and difficult to be touched by, or convinced of, good, or truth, or honesty.

Of necessity, also, her life had been

devoid of companionship. Too proud to tell her sorrows, and unable to endure the associations into which her husband's evil life would have led her had she been driven by loneliness to relax in her resolute isolation, she had neither sympathy nor pity in her wretchedness. But at length, and when things were going very hard and ill with her, she found a friend.

Time, suffering, and disenchantment had taught Margaret Hungerford many hard and heavy, but salutary, lessons, before the days came which brought her fate this alleviation; and she did not regret it, because it had been procured for her by the care and solicitude of James Dugdale.

Her love had died—more than died; for there is reverence and pious grief, with sweetness in its agony, and cherished recollections, to modify death and make it mer-

ciful—it had perished. So had her dislike of James Dugdale. He had been right, and she had been wrong; and though he could never be her friend, because she never could admit to him the one fact or the other, she thought gently and regretfully of him, when she thought of her old home and of the past at all, which was not often, for the present absorbed her usually in its misery and its toil.

When, in the course of their wanderings, the Hungerfords went to the then infant town, now the prosperous city, of Melbourne, Margaret sent home one of her infrequent letters to her father. Thus James Dugdale learned that the woman whose fate he had so unerringly foreseen—the woman he loved with calm, disinterested, clear-sighted affection—was at length within reach of his influence, of his indirect help.

An old friend, schoolfellow, and college chum—one Hayes Meredith, a younger man than James Dugdale by a few years—had been among the first of those tempted from the life of monotonous toil in England by the vast and exciting prospects which the young colony offered to energy, industry, ability, and courage.

Hayes Meredith possessed all these, and some capital too. He had settled at Port Phillip, and was a thriving and respected member of the motley community when Godfrey and Margaret Hungerford arrived to swell the tide of adventure and misery. To him James Dugdale wrote, on behalf of the woman whose need he divined, whose unhappiness he felt, with the instinct of sympathy.

Hayes Meredith responded nobly to his old friend's appeal. He befriended Margaret steadily, with and without her hus-

band's knowledge; he won her affection, conquered her reserve, softened her pride, and, though her fate was beyond amelioration by human aid, he succeeded in making her actual, everyday life more endurable.

When Margaret was sought out by Hayes Meredith, release was drawing near, release from the tremendous evil of her marriage. Godfrey Hungerford, by this time utterly incapable of any steady pursuit, and seized with one of the reckless, restless fits which were becoming more and more frequent with him, joined a party of explorers bound for the unknown interior of the continent, and, regardless of Margaret's fears and necessities, left her alone in the town.

For months she heard nothing of him, or the fate of the expedition; months during which she was kept from destitution

only by Hayes Meredith's generous and unfailing aid.

At length news came; a few stragglers from the party of explorers returned. Godfrey Hungerford was not among them; and the remnant related that he had been murdered, with two others, by a tribe of aborigines.

Hayes Meredith told Margaret the truth; he sustained and comforted her in the early days of her horror and grief; he counselled her return to England, and provided money for her voyage. He secured her cabin and the services of Rose Moore. It was he who bade her farewell upon the deck of the Boomerang—he of whom she thought as her only friend.

Margaret had little power of feeling, love, or gratitude in her now, as she believed, and that little was exerted for the alert, kindly-voiced, gray-haired, keen-eyed

man who left her with a heavy heart, and said to himself, as the boat shot away from the ship's side, 'Poor girl! she has had hard lines of it hitherto. I wonder what is before her in England!'

CHAPTER V.

CHAYLEIGH.

A BRIGHT soft day in the autumn—a day which appealed to all who dwelt in houses to come forth and taste the last lingering flavour of the summer in the sweet air—a day so still and peaceful that the sudden rustle of the leaves, as a few of their number (*ennuyés* leaves, tired of life sooner than their fellows) detached themselves, and came, gently wafted by the imperceptible air, to the ground, made one look round, as though at an intrusion upon its perfect repose—a day which appealed to memory, and said, ‘Am I not like some other day

in your life, on which you have pondered many things in your heart, and looked far back into the past without the agony of regret, and on into the future undisturbed by dread—a restful day, when life has seemed not bad to have, but very, very good to leave?’—a day on which any settled, stern, inexorable occupation seemed harder, more unbearable than usual, even to the least reasonable and most moderate idler—a day on which the house which Margaret Carteret had forsaken looked particularly beautiful, tranquil, and inviting.

The orderliness of Chayleigh was delightful; it was not formal, not oppressive; it was eminently tasteful. Inside the house and outside it order reigned, without tyrannising. The lawn was always swept with extreme nicety, and the flower-beds, though not pruned down to a tantalising precision, bore evident signs of artistic care.

The house stood almost in the centre of the small grounds, and long wide French windows in front, and bow windows in the rear, opened on smooth grassy terraces, which fell away by gentle inclines towards the flower-garden in front, and at the back towards a pleasaunce, with high prim alleys, and bosquets which in the pride of summer were thickset with roses; and so, to some clumps of noble forest-trees, behind which, and hidden, was the neat wire-fence which bounded the small demesne.

On this soft autumnal day, the three bow windows which opened on the terrace at the back of the house were open, and every now and then the white curtains faintly fluttered, and the leaves of the creepers which luxuriously festooned the window-frames gently rustled. Far above the height of the central window, an aspiring passion-flower, rich in the stiff, majestic,

symbolical blossom, stretched its branches, until they wreathed the window just above the centre bow, and aided an impertinent rose to look into the room. They had looked in ever since the one had blossom and the other leaves, but they had seen nothing there that lived or moved.

The middle room, above the suite of drawing-rooms—whose rosewood furniture, whose Ambusson carpets, and whose sparkling girandoles formed the chief delight and pride of Mrs. Carteret's not particularly capacious heart—had not been used since Margaret Carteret had left her home to follow the fortunes of her lover.

That such was the case was not due to any sentiment on Mr. Carteret's part, or any spite on that of his wife. If the former had happened to want additional space for any of his drying or 'curing' processes, he would have invaded his daughter's for-

saken room without the slightest hesitation, and, indeed, without recalling the circumstance of her former occupation, of his own accord; while it was quite safe from interference on the part of the latter for another and a different reason.

Mrs. Carteret's rooms were perfectly comfortable and sufficient, and she never had 'staying company.' She knew better. She was quite sufficiently hospitable without inflicting that trouble on herself, and she had no notion of it. Indeed, she never had any notion of doing anything which she did not thoroughly like, or of putting up with any kind of inconvenience for a moment if it were possible to free herself from it; and she had generally found it very possible. Life had rolled along wonderfully smoothly, on the whole, 'for Mrs. Carteret. She possessed one advantage which does not always fall to the lot of

supremely selfish and heartless people—she had an easy temper.

It is refreshing sometimes to observe how much utterly selfish people, whose sole object in life is to secure pleasure and to banish pain, suffer by the infliction upon themselves of their own temper. But Mrs. Carteret was bucklered against fate, even on that side. She took excellent and successful care that no one else should annoy her, and she never annoyed herself. It would have afforded a philosophic observer, indeed, some congenial occupation of mind to divine from what possible quarter, save that of severe bodily pain, discomfiture could reach Mrs. Carteret. She was very well off, perfectly healthy, wholly indifferent to every existing human being except herself and her cousin, had everything her own way as regarded both objects of affection, had got rid of her stepdaughter, and

had a very comfortable settlement 'in case anything should happen'—according to the queer formula adopted in speaking of the only absolute certainty in human events—to Mr. Carteret.

This seemingly-invulnerable person had no need of Margaret's room then, and when James Dugdale said to her,

'If you don't want that middle room over the drawing-room for any particular purpose, I should be glad to have the use of it for mounting my drawings, and so on; the light is very good,' she said at once,

'O yes; you mean Margaret's room, do you not? I don't want it in the least. I will have it put to rights for you at once; it is full of all her trumpery.'

No third person listening to the two would ever have discerned that any matter of feeling, or even embarrassment, had any

connection with the subject under mention, still less that the 'Margaret' in question had so lately left the home of her girlhood on a desperate quest, which the woman who spoke of her complacently believed to be desperate.

'Yes, I mean that room,' said James Dugdale in a careless tone; 'but pray don't have anything in it touched. I will see to all that myself; in fact, presuming on your permission, I have put a lot of my things in there, and the servants would play the deuce if they meddled with them. I may keep the key, Sibylla, I suppose?'

'Of course,' replied Mrs. Carteret; and from that moment she never gave the matter a thought, and James Dugdale had the key of Margaret's room, and he did put some sketch-books, some sheets of Bristol board, and other adjuncts of his favourite pursuit on a table, and thus form-

ally constituted his possession and his pretext. But he seldom unlocked the door; he rarely entered the apartment, even at first, and more and more rarely as time stole on, and all his worst fears and forebodings about Margaret Hungerford had been realised.

Sometimes, when all the house was quiet, on moonlight nights, his pale face and bent figure might have been seen, framed in the window, between the branches of the passion-flower which he had trained. There he would stand awhile, leaning against the woodwork and gazing into the sky, in whose vastness, whose distance, whose sameness over all the world, there is surely some vague comfort for the yearnings of absence, uncertainty, even hopeless separation, or why is the relief of it so often, so uniformly sought?

Sometimes, but not often, he wrote in

Margaret's room; one letter which he had written there had exerted a great influence upon her fate, how great he little knew. All the girl's little possessions were in the room, just as she had left them.

Tidy housemaids, with accurate ideas of the fitness of things, had come to and gone away from Chayleigh since the sole daughter of the house had taken her perilous way, according to her headstrong will, and had been disturbed, and even mutinous, in their minds concerning the 'middle room.' But on the whole they had obeyed orders; and James Dugdale, who had long ceased to be the 'tutor,' and was supposed to be Mrs. Carteret's stepbrother by the servants of late date in the establishment, enjoyed undisturbed possession of the trumpery water-colour sketches; the little desk with a sloping top, with 'Souvenir' engraved in flourishes on a mother-o'-pearl

heart inserted over the lock ; the embroidery-frame, the bead-worked watch-pocket, and the little library which occupied two hanging shelves, and chiefly consisted of the 'Beauties' of the poets, and a collection of 'Friendship's Offerings' and 'Forget-me-nots.'

James Dugdale's thoughts were busy with Margaret Hungerford that sweet autumn day—more busy with her than usual, more full of apprehension. The time that had elapsed had not deadened the feelings with which he regarded the wilful girl, who had scorned his interference, scoffed at and resented his advice, but been obliged to avail herself of his aid.

He knew that she had done so, but he knew nothing more. And as he roamed about the garden, and the terrace, and the pleasaunce, and rambled away to where the forest-trees stood stately, idly treading

the fallen leaves under his listless feet, so lately in their green brightness far above his head, he sickened with longing to know more definitely the fate of the absent girl.

‘She hated me then,’ he said with a sigh, as he turned once more towards the house; ‘and she is just the woman to hate me more because she has found out for herself that I was right.’

He little knew how fully, to how far greater an extent than he had discovered it, Margaret had learned the worthlessness of Godfrey Hungerford.

As he crossed the garden, a woman-servant came towards him, and asked him for the key of ‘the middle room.’ The request jarred upon him somehow, and he asked rather sharply what it was wanted for.

‘We are getting the cleaning done, sir;

master and missus is to be home on Saturday.'

James Dugdale handed the key to the housemaid, and entered the drawing-room through the open window.

'I may as well write to Haldane,' he muttered. 'The Canadian mail leaves to-morrow.'

When James Dugdale had written his letter, he went out again; but this time he took his way to the village, intending to post the packet, and then pursue his way to a 'bit' in the vicinity from which he was making a water-colour drawing.

As he passed the inn which occupied the place of honour in the hilly little street, the coach which ran daily from a large town on the south coast to London was drawn up before the door, and the process of changing horses was being accomplished to the lively satisfaction of nume-

rous bystanders, to whom this event, though of daily occurrence, never ceased to be exciting and interesting.

James Dugdale glanced carelessly at the clustering villagers and the idlers about the inn-door, of whom a few touched their hats or pulled their hair in his honour; observed casually that two female figures were standing in the floor-clothed passage, and that one of the ostlers was lifting a heavy trunk, of a seafaring exterior, down from the luggage-laden top of the coach; and then passed on, and forgot all these ordinary occurrences. He took his way to the scene of his intended sketch, and was soon busily engaged with his work.

When the autumnal day was drawing to its close, and the growing keenness of the air began to make itself felt, quickly too, by his sensitive frame, James Dug-

dale turned his steps homewards, and, taking the lower road, without again passing through the village, he skirted the clumps of forest-trees, and entered the little demesne by a small gate which led into the pleasaunce.

He had almost reached the grassy terrace, when, glancing upwards, as was his frequent custom,—it had been his habit in the time gone by, when Margaret's light figure and girlish face had often met the upturned glance,—he saw that the window was wide open, and some one was in the room; saw this with quick impatience, which made him step back a little, so as to get a clearer view of the intruder, and to mutter, as he did so,

‘Those confounded servants! What can they be doing there up to this time?’

But, as he murmured the words, James Dugdale started violently, and then stood

in fixed, motionless, incredulous amazement. The window of the middle room was wide open, and against the woodwork, framed by the blossoms and foliage of the passion-flower, leaned a slight figure, in a heavy black dress.

The slender hands were clasped together, and showed white against the sombre garb; the pale, clear-cut, severe young face, lighted by the last rays of the quickly-setting autumn sun, looked out upon the tranquil scene; but on every feature sat the deepest abstraction. The eyes were heedless of all near objects, fixed apparently upon the trees in the distance; they took no heed of the figure standing in rapt astonishment upon the terrace.

Not until James Dugdale uttered her name with a faltering, with an almost frightened voice, as one might address a spirit, did the face in the window droop,

and the eyes search for the speaker. But then Margaret Hungerford leaned forward, and said, quite calmly,

‘ Yes, Mr. Dugdale, it is I.’

CHAPTER VI.

HALF-CONFIDENCES.

‘You cannot surely be serious—you do not really mean it?’ said James Dugdale, in a pleading tone, to Margaret Hungerford, as, some hours after he had discovered her presence at Chayleigh, they were talking together in the drawing-room.

‘I do mean it,’ she replied. ‘You never understood me, I think, and you certainly do not understand me now, if you think I shall remain here dependent on my father, having left his house as I did.’

James Dugdale did not speak for some minutes. He was pondering upon what

she had said. He had never understood her! If not he, who ever had? Unjust to him she had always been, and she was still unjust to him. But that did not matter: it was of her he must think, not of himself.

The first bewildering surprise of Margaret's arrival had passed away; the mingled strangeness and familiarity of seeing her again, changed as she was, in the old home so long forsaken, had taken its place, and James Dugdale was looking at her, and listening to her, like a man in a dream.

Their meeting had been very calm and emotionless. Margaret, in addition to the hardness of manner which had grown upon her in her hard life, had felt no pleasure in seeing James Dugdale again. She had not quite forgiven him, even yet, and, though she was relieved by finding that the first explanations were to be given to

him, and not to her father or Mrs. Carteret, she had made them ungraciously enough, and with just sufficient formal acknowledgment of the service which James Dugdale had rendered her, in securing to her the friendship and aid of Hayes Meredith, as convinced her sensitive hearer that she would rather have been indebted to the kindness of any other person.

On certain points he found her reserve invulnerable; and he was not slow to suspect that she had made up her mind exactly as to how much of her past life she would reveal, and how much should remain concealed; and he did not doubt her power of adhering to such a resolution. She had briefly alluded to her widowhood, acknowledged the kindness she had experienced from Hayes Meredith, said a little about the poverty in which he had found her, and had then left the subject of her-

self and all concerning her, as if it wearied her, and with a decision of manner which prevented James Dugdale from questioning her further.

Her questions regarding her father, her brother, and all that had occurred at Chayleigh during her absence, were numerous and minute, and James answered them without reserve or hesitation. They chiefly related to facts. Margaret dealt but slightly in sentiment; but when she asked James if her father spoke of her sometimes, there was a little change in the tone of her voice, a slight accession of paleness which she could not disguise.

‘At first, very seldom; in fact, hardly ever, Margaret, for I see you wish the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; but more frequently of late. Only the day before he and Mrs. Carteret went to Bath, he—you remember his way—was showing

me a peculiarly repulsive specimen of some singularly hideous insect, and he said, "How pleased Margery would have been with *that*." Quite a hallucination, if I remember rightly, but still pleasant to hear him say it, and showed me that he was thinking of you. You see this as I do?

'O yes,' she answered, with a smile that was a little hard and bitter, 'very pleasant; indeed, the pleasantest possible association of ideas according to papa. And—and Mrs. Carteret?'

James Dugdale hesitated for a little, and then he said,

'You remember what Sibylla is, Margaret, and you know she never cared much for you, or Haldane—'

'Particularly for *me*,' she interrupted, in a tone whose assumed lightness did not impose on James. 'Well, she need not fear any intrusion or importunity from me. I

have come here because I must—I must see my father once more, before I have for ever done with the old life and begun with the new.’

‘Are you going away again, Margaret?’ said James, astonished. ‘Going away, after having come home through such suffering and difficulty! Why is this?’

And then it was that Margaret asked him if he were really serious in supposing she had any other intention.

The truth was, she had very vague notions of what she should do with herself. The pride and self-will of her nature, which the suffering she had undergone in Australia had somewhat tamed, had had time for their reawakening during the long voyage; and it was not in the most amiable of moods that Margaret reached her former home.

‘Whatever my fault may have been, I

have fully expiated it; and I must have peace now, and forgetfulness, if it is to be had,' was the form her thoughts took.

She had not been recognised at the village inn, where she had left Rose Moore and her scanty luggage, and the servant who had opened the door of her father's house to her was a stranger. He might fairly have hesitated to admit a lady whom he did not know; but Margaret's manner of announcing herself permitted no hesitation within his courage. His master and mistress were not at home, the man said, but she could see Mr. Dugdale when he came in. So she walked into the drawing-room, and James was sought for, but not found.

What agony of spirit the young widow underwent, when she found herself once more in the scene of the vanished past, none but she ever knew. The worst of it

had passed away when James saw her leaning out of the window, a picture framed in the branches of the passion-flower.

The hours of the evening went rapidly by, though the talk of the strangely-assorted companions was constrained and bald. Margaret was resolute in her refusal to remain at Chayleigh. James Dugdale, she argued, might believe that her father would gladly receive her; but he could not know that he would, and she would await that welcome before she made her old home even a temporary abode. A few sentences sufficed to show James that this determination was not to be overcome.

‘At least you are not alone,’ he said; and then she explained to him that Hayes Meredith had engaged an Irish girl, named Rose Moore, to act as her maid during the voyage, and that the girl, having become attached to her, was willing to defer her

departure to Ireland for a few days, until she, Margaret, had made some definite arrangement about her own future.

‘I got used to Irish people at Melbourne,’ said Margaret, ‘and I like them. I have half a mind to go to Ireland with Rose. I suppose people’s children want governesses there, and people themselves want companions as well as here; and I fancy they are kind and cordial there.’

‘You must be very much altered, Margaret,’ returned James gravely, ‘if you are fit to be either a governess or a *dame de compagnie*. I don’t think you had much in you to fit you for either function.’

‘I am very much altered,’ she said; ‘and what I am fit for, or not fit for, neither you nor any one can tell. There is only one thing which would come to me that would surprise or disconcert me *now*.’

She rose as she spoke, and drew her

heavy black cloak, which she had only loosened, not laid aside, closely around her.

‘And that is—’ said James.

‘Finding myself happy again, or being deceived into thinking myself so,’ she said quickly and bitterly.

This was the first thoroughly unrestrained sentence she had spoken in all their conversation, the first clear glimpse she had given James Dugdale into the depths of her heart and experience.

They went out of the house together, and she walked by his side—he did not offer his arm—to the village. The night was bright and beautiful, and some of its calm came to the heart of Margaret, and reflected itself in her pale steadfast face. The road which they took wound past the well-kept fences and ornamental palings of a handsome place, much larger than Chay-

leigh, which, in Margaret's time, had been in the possession of Sir Richard Davyntry, whose good graces, and those of Lady Davyntry, she remembered her stepmother to have been particularly anxious to cultivate.

Mrs. Carteret had not succeeded remarkably well in this design, and her failure was conspicuously due to her treatment of Margaret; for Lady Davyntry was a motherly kind of woman, much younger than Mrs. Carteret, and whose own childless condition was a deep and unaffectedly-avowed grief to her.

As Margaret and her companion passed the gates of Davyntry, she remembered these 'childish things,' as they seemed to her now, and she paused to look at the stately trees, and the fine old Elizabethan house, on whose gilded vane the moonlight was shining coldly.

She asked if Sir Richard and Lady Davyntry were staying there just now, adding, 'As I remember them, they were not people who, having a country house and place combining everything any one can possibly wish for, make a point of leaving it just when all is most beautiful.'

'No,' said James Dugdale, 'they certainly are not; and Sir Richard stuck to it, poor fellow, as long as he could; but he died nearly a year ago, and not at Davyntry either—at his brother-in-law's place in Scotland.'

'Indeed!' said Margaret. 'I am sorry for Sir Richard, and more sorry still for Lady Davyntry; she is a widow indeed, I am sure. Perhaps she wants a lady companion. I might offer myself: how pleased Mrs. Carteret would be!'

'Margaret!' said James Dugdale reprov-
ingly.

He spoke in the tone which had been familiar to him in the days when he had been 'the tutor' and Margaret his pupil; and she laughed for a moment with something of the same saucy laugh with which she had been used to meet a remonstrance from him in those old days. James Dugdale's heart beat rapidly at the sound; for the first time, her coming, her presence seemed real to him.

'Well, well, I won't be spiteful,' said Margaret. 'Is Lady Davyntry here?'

'Yes; she has been more than a month at Davyntry. Her brother is with her, and a remarkably nice fellow he is. I see a good deal of him.'

'I don't remember him. I don't think I ever saw him,' said Margaret absently. 'What is his name?'

James Dugdale did not note the ques-

tion, but replied to the first part of the sentence.

‘I don’t think you can have seen him. He was abroad for some years after his sister’s marriage; indeed, he never was here in Sir Richard’s lifetime—never saw him, I believe, until he and Lady Davyntry went to Scotland, on a visit, and he died there.’

‘Is he here now?’ Margaret asked in an indifferent manner.

‘Yes,’ returned James; ‘I told you so. He comes to Chayleigh a good deal. He is nearly as fond of natural history as your father, and nearly as fond of drawing as I am; so we are a mutual resource—Chayleigh and Davyntry I mean.’

‘And his name?’ again asked Margaret quietly.

‘Did I not tell you? Don’t you remember it? Surely you must have heard

the name; it is not a common one—Fitzwilliam Meriton Baldwin.'

'No, it is not common, and rather nice. I never heard it before, that I remember. We have arrived, I see; and there is Rose Moore looking out for me, like an impulsive Irish girl as she is, instead of preserving the decorous indifference of the truly British domestic. You will let me know when my father arrives. No, I shall not go to Chayleigh again until his return. Good-night, Mr. Dugdale.'

She had disappeared, followed by her attendant, whose frank handsome face had candidly expressed an amount of disapprobation of James Dugdale's personal appearance to which he was, fortunately, perfectly accustomed and philosophically indifferent. Fate had done its worst for him in that respect long before; and he had turned

away from the inn-door, and was walking rapidly down the road again, when a cheery voice addressed him :

‘Hallo, Dugdale! Where are you going at this time of night? and what are you thinking of? I shouted at you in vain, and thought I should never catch you. Are you going home? Yes?—then we shall be together as far as Davyntry.’

The speaker was a young man, perhaps six-and-twenty years old, a little over middle height, and, though not remarkably handsome, he presented as strong a contrast in personal appearance to James Dugdale as could be desired. He had a fair complexion, bright-blue eyes, with an expression of candour and happiness in them as rare as it was attractive, light-brown hair, and a lithe alert figure, full of grace and activity. In the few words which he had spoken there was something winning

and open, a tone of entire sincerity and gladness almost boyish ; and it had its charm for the older and careworn man, who answered cheerily, as he linked his arm with his own :

‘It is always pleasant to meet you, Baldwin ; but to-night it’s a perfect god-send.’

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD FAMILIAR FACES.

THE communication which James Dugdale made to Mr. Carteret on his arrival at Chayleigh was received by that gentleman not altogether without agitation, but with more pleasure than the ex-tutor had expected.

Mr. Carteret had missed his daughter, in his quiet way, and had occasionally experienced something which approached remorse during her absence, when he pondered on the probabilities of her fate, and found himself forced to remember how different it might have been had he 'looked after' the motherless girl a little more closely, had he extended some more sym-

pathy to her and exerted himself to understand her, instead of confining his fatherly fondness to occasional petting and careful avoidance of being bored by her.

Mr. Carteret was easily reconciled to most things, but he had never succeeded in reconciling himself thoroughly to Margaret's marriage and her exile, and he heard of her return with equal pleasure and relief. These feelings expanded into positive joy when he learned the delightful fact of Godfrey Hungerford's death.

In the first vague apprehension of James Dugdale's news, he had imagined that Margaret had left her husband and come home, and even that he hailed with satisfaction. But to know that his son-in-law was safely dead was an element of unmitigated good fortune in the matter. And so strongly and unaffectedly did Mr. Carteret feel this, that he departed from his usual mild

method of speech on the occasion, and delivered himself of some very strong language indeed.

‘The infernal scoundrel!’ he said; ‘he made her miserable, I’ve no doubt. She’ll never tell us anything about it, James, if I am not much mistaken in her, or she is not very much changed; and so much the better. I don’t want to hear anything about him; I should like to think I should never hear his name mentioned again as long as I live!’

‘Most likely you never will hear it mentioned, sir,’ said James. ‘If you like, I’ll tell Margaret you would rather she did not talk about him.’

‘Do, do,’ said Mr. Carteret eagerly. He hated explanations, and would never encounter anything he disliked if he could at all decently avoid doing so. ‘The only good or pleasant thing that could be heard

in connection with the fellow, I heard when you told me he was under the sod, and there is no use in hearing bad and unpleasant things. Of course, the child knows she is welcome home; and the very best thing she can do is to forget the scoundrel ever existed.'

The ignorance of human nature, and the oblivion of his wife's peculiarities, which this speech betrayed, were equally characteristic of Mr. Carteret; but James Dugdale could not smile at them when Margaret was concerned.

He determined to say nothing to the young widow's father about her expressed resolution of leaving Chayleigh again, but to abandon that issue to circumstances and the success of the mode of argument he intended to pursue with Mrs. Carteret. He would go and fetch Margaret home presently, when he had spoken to his cousin.

He thought it better her father should not accompany him, and Mr. Carteret, who had some very choice beetles to unpack and prepare, thought so too.

He delightedly anticipated Margaret's pleasure in exploring the extended treasures of his collection, and was altogether in such an elated state of mind that he had consigned the whole of Margaret's married life as completely to oblivion as he had forgotten the partner of that great disaster, by the time James Dugdale passed before the windows of his study on his way to fulfil his mission of peace and reconciliation.

It never occurred to him to think about how his wife was likely to take the news of Margaret's return. Mrs. Carteret had not given him any trouble herself, or permitted other people to give him any trouble, since Margaret and Haldane had gone their

own way in life, and he was not afraid of her departing now from that excellent rule of conduct.

‘Margaret is not a child now, and they are sure to get on together,’ said the mild and inexperienced elderly gentleman, as he daintily handled some insect remains as reverently as if they had been mummies of the Rameses; ‘each can have her own way.’ He had forgotten Margaret’s ‘own way,’ and he knew very little about Mrs. Carteret’s.

It was rather odd that his wife did not come to talk about the news that James Dugdale had communicated to her. He wondered at that a little. He would go and find her, and they should talk it over together, presently, when he had put this splendid scarabæus all right—a great creature!—how fortunate he had secured it, just as old Fooster was on the scent of it too!

And so Mr. Carteret went on, and the minutes went on, and he had not yet completed his arrangements for the adequate display of the scarabæus, when two figures, one in heavy black robes, passed quickly between him and the light. A window-sash was thrown up from the outside, and Margaret Hungerford's arms were round her father's neck.

Under the roof of Chayleigh, on that bright autumn night, there was but one tranquil sleeper. That one was Mr. Carteret. He was thoroughly happy. Margaret had come home, Godfrey Hungerford was dead, and she had never mentioned his name.

He felt some tepid gratitude towards Hayes Meredith: of course he should at once repay him the sums advanced to Margaret, and it would be a good opportunity of extending his correspondence and his

scientific investigations — the Australian fauna had much to disclose.

He had experienced a slight shock at observing the change in Margaret's appearance ; but that had passed away, and when Mr. Carteret fell asleep that night he acknowledged that everything was for the best in the long-run.

Mrs. Carteret had behaved very well. She had met Margaret kindly, with as much composure as if she had been away from home on a week's visit; had inquired whether 'her maid' would remain at Chayleigh; had added that 'her things' should be placed in her 'former' room; and had evinced no further consciousness of the tremendous change which had befallen her stepdaughter than was implied in the remark that 'widow's caps were not made so heavy now,' and that Margaret's 'crape skirt needed renewal.'

The evening had passed away quietly. To two of the four individuals who composed the little party it had seemed like a dream from which they expected soon to awaken. Those two were Margaret Hungerford and James Dugdale.

One slight interruption had occurred. A note had been handed to Mrs. Carteret from Lady Davyntry. She had heard of the return of her former 'pet' to Chayleigh—the expression was as characteristic of Lady Davyntry as it was unsuitably applied to Margaret, who was an unpromising subject for 'petting'—and hoped to see her soon. Mr. Meriton Baldwin would forego the pleasure of calling at Chayleigh that evening, as he could not think of intruding so soon after the arrival of Mrs. Hungerford.

Mrs. Carteret threw down the letter with rather an ill-tempered jerk, and her

face bore an expression which Margaret remembered with painful distinctness, as she said,

‘Very absurd, I think. I don’t suppose that Margaret would object to our seeing our friends because she is here.’

The speech was not framed as a question; but Margaret answered it, lifting up her head and her fair throat as she spoke, after a fashion which one observer, at least, thought infinitely beautiful.

‘Certainly not, Mrs. Carteret. Pray do not allow me to interfere with any of your usual proceedings.’

And then she went on talking to her father about the habits of the kangaroo.

The thoughts which held Mrs. Carteret’s eyes waking that night were anything but agreeable. She did not exactly know how she stood with regard to her step-daughter. If she determined on making

the house too unpleasant for her to bear it, she might find herself in collision with her husband and her cousin at once, unless she could contrive that the unpleasantness should be of a kind which Margaret's pride—which she detected to be little, if at all, subdued by the experiences of her married life—would induce her to hide from the observation of both.

Margaret should not live at Chayleigh if Mrs. Carteret could prevent it; but whatever means she used to carry her purpose into effect must be such as James Dugdale could not discover or thwart. The thing would be difficult to do; but Mrs. Carteret had well-grounded confidence in her own power of carrying a point, and this was one which must be held over for the present. It was agreeable to be able to decide that, at all events, Margaret was no beauty, that she was decidedly much less handsome

than she had been as what Mrs. Carteret called 'a raw girl.'

And this was true, to the perception of a superficial observer. Margaret looked very far from handsome as she sat in a corner of the bow-window of the drawing-room, her small thin hands folded and motionless, her head, with its hideous covering, bent down; her pale face, sharpened by the angle at which the light struck it, and her whole figure, in its deep black dress, unrelieved by the slightest ornament or grace of form, pervaded by an expression of weariness and defeat. She might have been a woman of thirty years old, and who had never been handsome, to the perception of any stranger who had then and thus seen her.

But, three hours later in the night, when Margaret Hungerford was alone in the room which had been the scene of her

girlish dreams and hopes, of the fond and beautiful delusion so terribly dissipated—in the room where her dead mother had watched her in her sleep, where she had read and yielded to the lover's prayer which lured her from her home—when she was quite alone, and was permitting the waves of memory to rush over her soul;—no one would have said, who could then have seen her, that Margaret was not handsome. Her face was one capable of intensity of expression in every mood of feeling, and as mobile as it was powerful. The wakeful hours of that night passed over her while another crisis in her life was lived through—another crisis somewhat resembling, and yet differing from, that which had marked the first hours of her voyage.

She had sent Rose Moore away as soon as she could, but not before the girl had

imparted to her her conviction that English people, always excepting Margaret, were 'quare.' She could not understand the tranquillity of the widowed daughter's reception at Chayleigh. The reception awaiting her in the 'ould country' would be of a very different kind, 'plase God,' she added internally; and the extent and importance of the business of eating and drinking among the servants had gone nigh to exasperate her.

Rose was devoted to Margaret, but she thought the sooner she and her mistress turned their back on a place where servants sat down to four regular meals a day, and did not as much as know the meaning of the 'Mass,' the better.

'She'll never do for these people,' the girl thought, as she waited for Margaret in her room; 'she's restless with sorrow, and it's not a nice nate place, like this, with

the back parlour full of spiders laid out in state, as if they were wakin' them, and little boxes full of bones—nor yet the drawin'-room, all done out with bades, and a mother, by way of, sittin' in it that 'ud think more of one of her tay-cups bein' chipped than of the young crayture's heart bein' broken—that 'll ever bring comfort or consolation to the likes of her.'

The thoughts which had put themselves into such simple words in the Irish girl's mind had considerable affinity with Margaret's own, but in her they took more tumultuous form. The strong purpose, half remorse, half vain - longing, which had brought her home, was fulfilled. She had seen the place she had left, and thoroughly realised that her former self had been left with it.

The few hours which had passed had made her comprehend that her life, her

nature, were things apart from Chayleigh ; she could not, if she would, take up the story of her girlhood where she had closed the book. Between her and every former association, the dark and miserable years of her married life—unreal as they seemed now—almost as unreal as the illusion under which she had entered upon them—had placed an impassable gulf.

Wrapped in a dressing-gown, and with her dark hair loose upon her shoulders, Margaret paced her room from end to end, and strove with her thoughts. She was a puzzle to herself. What discord there was between her—a woman who had suffered such things, seen such sights, heard such words as she had seen, and heard, and suffered—and the calm, well-regulated, comfortable household here! If she had ever contemplated remaining an inmate of her father's house, this one night's com-

mune with herself would have forced her to recognise the impossibility of her doing so. The stain and stamp of her wanderings were upon her ; she could not find rest here, or yet.

Her father's dreamy ways ; the selfishness, heartlessness, empty-headedness of Mrs. Carteret ; the distaste she felt for James Dugdale's presence, though she persuaded herself she was striving to be grateful ;—all these things, separately and collectively, she felt, but they did not present themselves to her as the true sources of her present uncontrollable feelings : she knew how utterly she was changed now only when she knew—for it was knowledge, not apprehension—that the home to which she had found her way of access so much easier than she had thought for, could never be a resting-place for her.

Was there any resting-place anywhere?

Had she still to learn that life's lessons are not exhausted by one or two great shocks of experience, but are daily tasks until the day, 'never so weary or long,' has been 'rung to evensong'? She was a puzzle to herself in another respect. No grief for the dead husband, the lover for whom she had left the home which could not be restored, had come back to her. No gentle tender chord had been touched in her heart, to give forth his name in mournful music.

In this, the truth, the intellectual strength of her nature, unknown to her, revealed themselves. No sentimentality veiled the truth from Margaret. She had said to herself that it was well for her her husband was dead, no matter what should come after, and she never unsaid it,—not even in the hours of emotional recollection and mental strife which formed her first night under her father's roof.

Standing by the window at which James Dugdale had first caught sight of her the day before, Margaret clasped her hands over her head and looked out drearily. The moon was high, the light was cold and ghastly. She thought how she had seen the same chill gleam upon the shimmering sea, and upon the grassy wastes of the distant land she had left; and the fancy came to her that it was to be always moonlight with her for evermore.

‘No more sunshine; no more of the glow, and the glitter, and the warmth—that is done with for me. There’s no such thing as happiness, and I must only try to find, instead, hard work.’

There was another wakeful head at Chayleigh that night. James Dugdale was but too well accustomed to sleepless nights, companioned by the searching, mysterious

pain which so often attends upon deformity—pain, as if unseen fingers questioned the distorted limbs and lingered among the disturbed nerves; but it was not that which kept him waking now.

It was that he, too, was face to face with his fate, questioning it of its past deeds and its intentions for the future—a little bitterly questioning it, perhaps, and yet with more resignation than rancour after all, considering what the mind of the man was, and what a prison-house it tenanted. Among the innumerable crowd of thoughts which pursued and pressed upon each other, there was one all the more distinct that he felt and strove against its unworthiness.

‘I am so thankful she is at home—so glad for her sake. Nothing could be so well for her, since the past is irrevocable; but nothing could be so bad, at least no-

thing could be worse for me. No, nothing, nothing.'

And James Dugdale, happily blind to the further resources of his destiny, felt something like a dreary sense of peace arising within him as he assured himself over and over again of the finality to which it had attained.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. CARTERET IS CONGRATULATED.

‘I AM positively dying to see her—I am indeed; you have no notion what a darling she is. I am sure you would be delighted with her, Fitzwilliam!’

These gushing sentiments were uttered by Lady Davyntry, and addressed to her brother, Mr. Fitzwilliam Meriton Baldwin, while they were at breakfast together, on the morning after Lady Davyntry’s note had been received at Chayleigh.

Lady Davyntry was given to gushing. She was a harmless, emotional kind of woman, who had led a perfectly discreet

and comfortable life, and had never known a sorrow until the death of her husband.

Lady Davyntry was a very pretty woman—as pretty at her present age, thirty-five, as she had been at any time since she had turned the corner of extreme youth. Her mild, lambent blue eyes were as bright as they had ever been, and her fair, rather thick skin had lost neither its purity nor its polish.

She had been rich, well cared for, and happy all her life; she had never had any occasion to exert herself; the ‘sorrows of others’ had cast but light and fleeting ‘shadows over’ her; and her sentimentalism, and the romance which had not been much developed in the course of her prosperous uneventful life, were quite ready for any demands that might be made upon them by an event of so much local interest as the return of Mr. Carteret’s

daughter, whose marriage was generally understood to have been very unfortunate.

She was interested in the occurrence for more than the sufficient reason that she had liked and pitied Margaret in her neglected girlhood. Perhaps the strongest sentiment of dislike which had ever been called forth in the amiable nature of Lady Davyntry had been excited by, and towards, Mrs. Carteret.

The two women were entirely antagonistic to each other; and Lady Davyntry felt a thrill of gratification on hearing of Margaret's return, in which a conviction that that event had taken place without Mrs. Carteret's sanction, and would not be to her taste, had a decided share.

She had favoured her brother—to whom she was very much attached, and who was so much younger than she that he did not

inspire her with any of the salutary reserve which induces sisters to disguise their favourite weaknesses from brothers—with a full and free statement of her feelings on this point, and he had not strongly combated her antipathy to Mrs. Carteret. The truth was, he shared it.

Mr. Baldwin had risen from the breakfast-table, and was standing, newspaper in hand, by a large window which commanded an extensive view, including the precise angle of the little demesne of Chayleigh in which the rear of the house and the window of Margaret's room, with its frame of passion-flowers, could be seen—not distinctly, but clearly enough to induce the eyes of any one gazing forth upon the scene to rest upon it mechanically.

His sister rose also, as she repeated her assurance that Margaret was a 'darling,' and joined him.

‘Look,’ she said; ‘you have sharp eyes, I know. There is some one leaning out of the centre window. I see a figure, don’t you?’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Baldwin; ‘I see a figure, all in black,—there’s a flutter of something white. Who is it?’

‘I’m sure it’s Margaret,’ said Lady Davyntry, ‘and the white thing must be the strings of her widow’s cap, poor child. How horrid it will be to see her sweet, pretty little face in it! Ah, dear! to think that she and I should meet under such similar circumstances!’ and Lady Davyntry sighed, and a tear made its appearance in each of her calm blue eyes.

‘Similar circumstances!’ repeated her brother, in some surprise. ‘Ah, yes! you are both widows, to be sure; but the similarity stops there; if what Dugdale said, or rather implied, be true,—as of course

it is,—you and Mrs. Hungerford wear your rue with a difference.’

‘We do, indeed,’ said Lady Davyntry. ‘Give me that field-glass, Fitz. I must make out whether that really is Margaret.’ And then she added, as she adjusted the glass to her sight, ‘And I pity her for that too. I cannot fancy any lot more pitiable than being forbidden by one’s reason to feel grief. Yes,’ she went on, after a minute, ‘it *is* Margaret. I can see her figure quite plainly now. Look, look, Fitz!’ and she held out the glass to him. But Mr. Baldwin did not take it from her hand; he smiled, and said:

‘No, no, Nelly, I could not take the liberty of peeping surreptitiously at Mrs. Hungerford. You forget you are renewing your acquaintance with her; mine has to be made.’

‘That’s just like your punctilio,’ said

his sister. 'I declare I feel the strongest impulse to nod to her, this glass brings her so near; and you are a goose for your pains. However, when you do see her, I prophesy you will agree with me that she is a darling, a delightful girl.'

'Well, but,' said Mr. Baldwin, who was amused by his sister's enthusiasm, 'you forget how long it is since you have seen this paragon, and that she is not a girl at all, but an unhappy and ill-treated wife, who has lately had the good fortune to become a widow.'

'That's true,' said Lady Davyntry; 'but I'll not believe that any change could interfere with Margaret's being a darling. At all events, I am going to see for myself this very day.'

'So soon?' asked Mr. Baldwin, in a surprised tone.

'So soon! why not? You don't sup-

pose Margaret has any tender confidences with Mrs. Carteret which must not be broken in upon, and, as for her father, I am sure he is as much accustomed to her being there, since yesterday, as if she were one of those horrid specimens *en permanence*.'

Mr. Baldwin laughed. 'I don't suppose the meeting has been very demonstrative,' he said, 'considering the parties to it whom I *do* know, and Dugdale's account of the party whom I *do not*. According to the little he said, Mrs. Hungerford's firmness and reserve are wonderful—more wonderful than pleasing, I should consider them.'

'Never mind Mr. Dugdale, Fitz,' replied his sister. 'He never liked Margaret either I believe: I know she quarrelled with him at the time of her love-affair. It is very likely he does not like her coming home; she may make things unpleasant for

him now, you know, which she could not when quite a girl. Don't you mind *him*. Take my word for it, the young widow is a darling.'

'Take care, Nelly; that is rather a dangerous thing to insist upon so strongly, except that you know I have a prejudice against widows—always excepting *you*,' he added, as she raised a warning finger.

'Nonsense,' said Lady Davyntry; and then she left the room, and her brother resumed his newspaper; but, as he folded it and prepared to read the leading articles leisurely, he thought, 'I wonder if she is really nice. Certainly Dugdale did not convey to *me* any impression that he did not like her, or that her coming was contrary to his convenience,—rather the opposite, I think. This must be a fancy of Nelly's.'

'Am I right? Did I say too much of

Margaret, you incredulous Fitz?' asked Lady Davyntry of her brother, when the gates of Chayleigh had closed upon them at the termination of an unusually protracted visit, during which Mrs. Carteret had endured the mortification of seeing Lady Davyntry in a character of affectionate neighbourliness, which had never been evoked by all her own strenuous and unrelaxed efforts.

'Did you ever see a nicer creature?' persisted the impulsive Nelly, 'and though of course she's changed, I assure you I never thought her so handsome when she was quite a girl; and her quiet manner—so dignified and ladylike—not cold though: you didn't think it cold, did you, Fitz?'

'Not cold to *you*, certainly,' replied Mr. Baldwin, who was glad to escape, by answering this one, from the more direct question his sister had put to him at first.

‘No, no,’ she went on; ‘quite cordial; and I told her how I looked at her with the glass this morning, and how you were quite too proper and precise to follow my example; and she blushed quite red for a moment—her pale face looked *so* pretty—and just glanced at you for an instant: it was when Mr. Carteret was bothering you about the articulations of something—and I’m sure she thought you very nice and gentlemanly, and——’

‘What *I* thought of Mrs. Hungerford is more to your present purpose, Nelly,’ said her brother, in an embarrassed voice. ‘I quite agree with you in thinking her very charming, but she looks as if she had gone through a great deal.’

‘Yes; doesn’t she, poor dear?’ said Lady Davyntry, who simply did not possess the power to comprehend even the outlines of Margaret’s life; ‘but now that she is at

home, it will be all right; I shall have her with me as much as possible, and she will soon forget all her troubles.'

Mr. Baldwin did not reply. There was something in Mrs. Hungerford's face which forbade him to believe that Davyntry and its mistress would prove a panacea for whatever was the source of that expression. It was not grief, as grief is felt for the dead who have been worthily loved and are fitly mourned.

It was an utter forlornness, combined with suppressed energy. It was the expression of one who had been utterly deceived and disappointed, and was now crushed by the sense of bankruptcy and defeat in life. The quiet manner which had been so satisfactory to the shallow perceptions of Lady Davyntry did not impress her brother in the same way.

'That is a woman,' he thought, 'who

has gone perilously near to the confines of despair.'

When he had seen Lady Davyntry into the house, Mr. Baldwin turned away from the door, and went a long ramble through the fields. His wanderings did not take him out of Chayleigh; and once he stood still, looking towards the window where Margaret's figure had been dimly seen by him that morning, and thought,

'What does this woman mean to me? Not a mere passing interest in my life! What does this woman mean?'

'I suppose you don't see much change in Lady Davyntry?' Mrs. Carteret said to Margaret, after the visitors had departed. 'She is as nice-looking, in a common way, and as full of herself as usual.'

'Lady Davyntry was always very kind to me,' replied Margaret gravely. 'In that she is certainly unchanged.'

‘O yes, she’s kind enough, in her empty way,’ said Mrs. Carteret; ‘but for my part I don’t care about those violent intimacies. I never would be led into them—they are quite in her way. If I would have responded, there would have been perpetual running back and forward between Davyntry and Chayleigh; but that sort of thing does not suit me—I consider it vulgar and insincere.’

Margaret did not exactly know, but she suspected, quite correctly, that her stepmother was endeavouring to disguise a considerable amount of pique under this depreciation of undue intimacy. She therefore made no reply, and Mrs. Carteret continued:

‘I daresay she will be taking you up violently, for a while, until she tires of you. The fuss she makes with her brother is quite absurd. He is a nice-look-

ing young man, and nothing more. Don't you think so, Margaret?

'He is nice-looking, certainly,' said Margaret; 'but I have seen too little of him to pronounce any further.'

'He has the great attraction of being very rich,' said Mrs. Carteret, in a sharp tone; Margaret's cautious and reasonable reply irritated her. 'If he dies without heirs, his sister will have all the Scotch property; it is worth fifteen thousand a-year, and entailed on heirs general. It is a wonder some manœuvring mother has not made a prize of him long ago. He's rather a soft party, I should say.'

'Should you?' said Margaret. 'Mr. Baldwin looks firm as well as gentle, I think—not the sort of man to be married by anybody without his own unqualified consent.'

‘Of course he’s a great catch,’ said Mrs. Carteret, ‘and I understand he is terribly afraid of ladies. He thinks every woman who looks at him is in love with himself or his acres.’

‘Indeed,’ said Margaret — and there was a tone of polite incredulity in her voice—‘I should not have taken Mr. Baldwin to be a vulgar-minded man.’

‘I daresay not,’ returned Mrs. Carteret ; ‘he is rather prepossessing than otherwise to strangers; but then, you know, Margaret, your judgment of men has been rather rash than infallible hitherto. Dear me! I had no notion it was so late—time to dress for dinner!’

Mrs. Carteret rose, laid aside her everlasting fancy - work, and left the room. Margaret rose also, but lingered for a few moments. As she stood with her hands

pressed upon her temples, and her pale face drawn into a look of pain, she thought :

‘ I wonder, if James Dugdale had heard that speech, would he think I could possibly stay here.’

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THE WOMAN MEANT.

A MONTH had elapsed since Margaret Hungerford's return to her father's house, and had brought with it certain changes in the situation of things at Chayleigh, which, though they could not have been understood by outsiders, were very keenly appreciated by the actors in the small domestic drama there.

It had brought to Margaret more calm and peace. It had not changed her intention of leaving Chayleigh, of seeking some independent means of providing for herself; but it had decreased her anxiety to put this intention into immediate, or

even into very early, execution. The main element in this alteration was her perception of her father's pleasure in her society.

‘It is not much to bear for *his* sake,’ she said to herself, ‘to put up with Mrs. Carteret. I have had worse things than that to endure without the power or the prospect of escaping from them either, and I will stay for six months with papa. James Dugdale thinks it the right thing, and, if Mrs. Carteret is convinced that it is to be only for six months, she will see that her best policy, in pursuit of her favourite plan of making things pleasant for papa, in order to have her own way thoroughly in things she really cares about, is by behaving properly to me. I will take care she shall labour under no delusive fears about my having come to take up my abode here; and then I am much out of

my calculations, and egregiously mistaken in my amiable stepmother, if she does not change her tactics altogether.'

The result justified Margaret's calculations. She took an early opportunity of informing Mrs. Carteret that she did not contemplate a long stay at Chayleigh.

The intimation was received by her stepmother with much propriety of manner, but without the slightest warmth. She designed to let Margaret perceive that while she (Mrs. Carteret) was too ladylike, too perfectly trained and finished in the polished proprieties of life to fail in the fulfilment of the exact laws of hospitality, it had never occurred to her to consider Margaret in any other light than that of a guest; and that she therefore regarded the communication as merely relating to the duration of her visit.

Margaret clearly perceived her mean-

ing, but she did not resent it, nor did it grieve her. The peace of a settled resolution had come to her. Mrs. Carteret condescended to express her approbation of Margaret's determination, and her readiness to assist her in carrying it into effect.

‘Nothing is more admirable in young people than an independent spirit,’ said the approving lady; ‘and, notwithstanding your unfortunate marriage, Margaret, I consider you as a young person still. You are quite right in considering it unjust that your father should be expected to provide for you twice over—first, in handing over the money you were not really entitled to, to that unpleasant person, Mr. Hungerford, and a second time, by having you to live here.’

‘My father is not expected, either by me or by any one that I know of, to do anything of the kind,’ interrupted Margaret,

with a slight quivering of the lips and a transient accession of colour to the pale cheeks.

‘That is just what I am saying, my dear. I highly commend your very proper view. It would be quite my own. Indeed, I am sure, were I in your position, I could not endure dependence, even if my father were a much richer man than yours is. I cannot understand any one not doing anything to secure independence.’

Margaret smiled, rather a hard kind of smile, as she thought there was one thing she certainly would not do to attain independence, and that one thing was precisely what Miss Martley had done in becoming Mrs. Carteret.

The elder lady continued to talk for some time longer in the same strain, and at length she asked Margaret how she intended to procure occupation.

‘I have not thought about that part of it yet,’ she replied.

Then Mrs. Carteret allowed the truth to slip out; then she betrayed her real consciousness of the meanness she was perpetrating. She shifted her eyes uneasily away from Margaret’s face, as she said,

‘I should not mention the matter to any one about here if I were you, Margaret. People talk so oddly, and your father might not like it. I always think, when anything of the kind is to be done, it had better be away from home, and among a different connection.’

Margaret answered her with hardly-disguised contempt:

‘Your warning comes rather late. I have already told Lady Davyntry of my intention, which she approves as much as you do. She has been good enough to promise me her friendship and interest in

settling matters to my satisfaction. As for papa, he will not mind how I do it, when I can succeed in reconciling him to my doing it at all.'

Mrs. Carteret felt strongly tempted to get into a violent rage, and relieve her vexation, which was intense, by saying anything and everything which anger might suggest to her, to Margaret.

That Lady Davyntry, who had taken no notice of the advances she had made towards an intimacy which would have been a social triumph to Mrs. Carteret—Lady Davyntry who, since Margaret's return, had gone so near ignoring her stepmother's existence as was consistent with the observance of the commonest civility—that she should be admitted behind the scenes, that Margaret should instruct her in the *dessous des cartes*, was gall and wormwood to her. She had never been very far off hating

Margaret hitherto; her quiet stealthy dislike to the girl now deepened into the darker feeling; and though she merely replied, 'O, then, in that case, it cannot be helped,' Margaret knew that that minute marked an era in Mrs. Carteret's feelings towards her.

'Never mind,' she said to herself, as though she had been encouraging another person; 'never mind, it is only for six months. She will always be civil to me, and it can't last.'

She was right; Mrs. Carteret always was civil to her. She was a woman in whom cunning and caution were at least as strong as temper, and she took counsel of both in this instance. She was by no means free from an uneasy suspicion that, if Margaret had formed a contrary determination, her influence with her father

would have outweighed that which she herself could have exerted.

It behoved her, therefore, to be thankful that the occasion for testing that unpleasantly-important point had not arisen, and to confine her tactics to such consistently-ceremonious treatment of Margaret as should keep her position as only a guest constantly before her eyes, and maintain her resolution by the aid of her pride; while all should be so contrived as to avoid attracting the attention of her absent-minded husband.

Mrs. Carteret conquered her temper, therefore—an operation in which she found the counting of the stitches of her everlasting fancy-work afforded her a good deal of assistance — and, after a short pause, took up a collateral branch of the same subject.

Margaret had dismissed Rose Moore,

and the girl had gone on her journey with a weight at her heart which she would have hardly believed possible, seeing that she was going home. But she had come to love Margaret very much, and she was very imperfectly consoled for parting with her by the distant hope which the young widow held out of a future meeting.

‘You will be married, and away in a house of your own, my dear girl, very soon, and you will not care much about anything else then; but I promise you, if ever I want you very much, Rose, I will send for you. I don’t think I ever *can* want you, in all my life, as much as I wanted you when you came to me; and of course you never can want me; your life is laid out for you too securely for that.’

‘None of us can tell *that*,’ said Rose Moore; ‘who knows?’

‘Well, of course no one knows,’ said

Margaret; 'but it looks like it. However, we shall never forget one another, Rose, and if either can help the other, the one who can will.' And with this understanding they parted.

Mrs. Carteret had never taken any notice of Rose Moore, who, in her turn, had held the lady of the house in slight reverence. Mrs. Carteret had a constitutional aversion to the Irish. She considered them half-civilised beings, with a natural turn for murder, a natural unfitness for domestic service, and an objectionable predilection for attending the ceremonial observances of their religion.

As an Irishwoman, then, Rose Moore was antipathetic to her; and as a devoted though humble friend of her stepdaughter's, she was something more. The Irish girl's bright-hearted love and sympathy for the young widow was positively repulsive to

Mrs. Carteret, because there was a reproach in it.

But when Rose was actually gone, Mrs. Carteret found herself in a difficulty. She disliked the idea of a successor to Rose being found, because her narrow, grasping nature was of the small tyrant order, and she could not endure that in her house there should be any one who did not owe allegiance *to her*.

Another reason was to be found in Mrs. Carteret's parsimony. She was as avaricious as she was despotic, and both these passions were stirred within her when she asked Margaret, in the most distant and uninterested tone which even she could assume, whether she had yet made any arrangements about replacing Rose Moore. 'Moore,' she called her, after the English fashion, which had been a deadly offence to Rose.

‘Calling you as if you were either a man or a dog,’ the indignant damsel had said.

‘It’s the English fashion, Rose,’ Margaret had pleaded in mitigation.

‘Then it’s like more of their fashions, and they ought to be ashamed of it, and would if they were Christians. However, I suppose English servants put up with that, or anythin’ else, for their four meals a-day, and snacks into the bargain, and their beer, and the liberty their clargy gives them to backbite their masters and mistresses.’

Margaret tried to explain that neither in this nor in any other particular were the objects of Rose’s indignant scorn in the habit of applying to their ‘clargy;’ but this was an enormity which she found the girl’s mind was quite incapable of receiving as a truth.

Mrs. Hungerford replied to Mrs. Carteret's question, that she had no intention of providing a successor for Rose Moore.

'I should have thought it quite unnecessary to tell you so,' she said, rather angrily. 'You can hardly suppose I am in a position to keep a maid. Even if I were for the present, to accustom myself to any luxury which I must lose at the end of six months would be unpardonable folly and weakness.'

'You are quite right, my dear,' said Mrs. Carteret, with a cordial tone in her voice, and a side-glance in her eye of intense dislike of the speaker. 'I admire your correct and self-denying principle, but I am not sure that your father will like it. While you stay with us, I am sure he would not wish you to be without a maid.'

Margaret did not take much trouble to

conceal the contempt which animated the smile that she permitted to pass slowly over her face as she replied:

‘Pray do not trouble yourself about that, Mrs. Carteret. If papa thinks about it at all, which is very unlikely, he will know how little personal attendance I have been accustomed to. But you and I know the fact of there being a servant more or less in the house will never present itself to his notice. Pray make your mind easy on that point.’

‘But there’s—’ said Mrs. Carteret hesitatingly—‘there’s James, you know; he is sure to know that Moore has left you, and to find out whether you have got any one to replace her.’

‘Make your mind easy about *that*, too, Mrs. Carteret,’ said Margaret; and the confidence in her tone was particularly displeasing. ‘I will take care that Mr.

Dugdale understands *my* wishes in this matter.'

So Mrs. Carteret carried three points. She avoided having a servant in the house who should not be her servant; she escaped an additional expense; and she was exempted, by Margaret's express disclaimer, from offering her the services of her own maid—an offer which, had she found herself obliged to make it, Mrs. Collins would probably have declined to carry into execution. There was one person in the world of whom Mrs. Carteret was afraid, and that individual was Mrs. Collins.

When the conversation between Margaret and Mrs. Carteret had come to an end, to their mutual relief, Margaret went to her father. As she approached the study, she heard voices, and knew she should not find him alone.

'I suppose it is James,' she thought,

and entered the room. But it was not James; it was Mr. Baldwin, who held a large old-looking volume in his hand, and was discussing with Mr. Carteret a passage concerning the structure of crustacea. He closed the book, and replaced it on the table with great alacrity, as Margaret came in and spoke to him. Then she turned to her father. 'I was going to talk to you for a little while, papa; but as Mr. Baldwin is here—'

'Never mind that, Margery,' said her father; 'Mr. Baldwin was just going to the drawing-room to see Sibylla and you. He has a message for you from Lady Davyntry.'

Mr. Baldwin confirmed Mr. Carteret's statement, and took from his waistcoat-pocket a tiny note, folded three-corner-wise. This was before the invention of square envelopes and dazzling monograms;

and female friendship, confidences, and general gushingness usually expressed themselves in the three-cornered form.

Margaret took the note, and, passing before the 'specimen'-laden table, went to the window and seated herself on the low, wide, uncushioned ledge. She held the twisted paper in her hand, and looked idly out of the window, before she broke the seal, unconscious that Mr. Baldwin was looking at her with an eager interest which rendered him singularly inattentive to the arguments addressed to him by Mr. Carteret in pursuance of the discussion which Margaret's entrance had interrupted.

The girlish gracefulness of her attitude contrasted strangely with her sombre heavy dress; the soft youthfulness of her colourless face made the harsh lines of the close crimped cap an odious anachronism.

‘MY DARLING MARGARET,’—this was the note,—‘I have such a cold, I *cannot* get to you. Do be charitable, and come to me. My brother will escort you, and will see you home at night, unless you will stay.

‘Always your devoted

‘ELEANOR.’

The renewed acquaintance with Lady Davyntry was at this time an event of a fortnight old, and the irrepressible Eleanor had to a certain extent succeeded in thawing the frozen exterior of the young woman’s demeanour. Kindness, if even it were a little silly and over-demonstrative, was a refreshing novelty to Margaret, and she welcomed it.

At first she had been a little hard, a little incredulous towards Lady Davyntry;

she had been inclined to treat her rapidly-developed fondness for herself as a *caprice de grande dame*. But she soon abandoned that harsh interpretation; she soon understood that, though it was exaggerated in its expression, the affection with which she had inspired Lady Davyntry was perfectly sincere.

Hence it came that Margaret had told her friend what were her views for her future; but she had not raised the veil which hid the past. Of that dreadful time, with its horrid experience of sin and misery, with its contaminating companionship, and the stain which it had left of such knowledge of evil and all the meanness of vice as never should be brought within the ken of pure womanhood at any age, Margaret never spoke, and Lady Davyntry, though inquisitive enough in general, and by no means wanting in curiosity in this particu-

lar instance, did not seek to overcome her reticence.

She had considerable delicacy of mind, and, in Margaret's case, affection and interest brought her not-naturally-bright intelligence to its aid. She had noticed and understood the changeableness of Margaret's moods. She had seen her, when animated and seemingly happy in conversation with her or Mr. Baldwin (what a treat it was to hear those two talk! she thought), suddenly lapse into silence, and all the colour would die out of her cheeks, and all the light from her eyes—struck away from them doubtless by the stirring of some painful memory, aroused from its superficial slumber by some word or phrase in which the pang of association lurked.

She had seen the expression of weariness which Margaret's figure had worn at first come over it again, and then the

drooped head and the listless hands had a story in them, from even trying to guess at which the kind-hearted woman, whose one grief had no touch of shame or dread or degrading remembrance in it, shrunk with true delicacy and keen womanly sympathy.

Lady Davyntry had been a daily visitor at Chayleigh since Margaret's return. She treated Mrs. Carteret with civility; but she made it, as she intended, evident that the attraction was Margaret, and Mrs. Carteret had to endure the mortifying conviction as best she could. Her best was not very good, and she never allowed an opportunity to pass of hitting Margaret's friend as hard as her feeble powers of sarcasm, which only attained the rank of spite, enabled her to hit her. Lady Davyntry was totally unconscious, and Margaret was profoundly indifferent.

It happened, however, on this particular day, after the conclusion of Mrs. Carteret's conversation with her stepdaughter, and while she was superintending the interesting operation, performed by Collins, of altering the trimmings of a particularly becoming dress, that she came to a determination to alter her tactics. She had not to dread a permanent invasion of her territory, a permanent usurpation of her place by Margaret; she would therefore profit by the temporary evil, and so entangle Lady Davyntry in civilities that it would be impossible for her to withdraw from so *affiché* an intimacy when Margaret should have left Chayleigh.

In all this there was not a particle of regard for Lady Davyntry, of liking for her society, of a wish that the supposed intimacy should become real. It would be quite enough for her that the Croftons

and the Crokers, the Willises, the Wyn-groves, and the Savilles should know that Lady Davyntry was on the most familiar terms with the Carterets, and quite beyond those to which any other family in the neighbourhood could lay claim.

Mrs. Carteret's busy small brain began to entertain an idea that Margaret's stay might be made profitable, in a social point of view, to her future position.

The writing of the note of which Mr. Baldwin was the bearer had been the subject of some doubt and discussion between Lady Davyntry and her brother.

'Do you think it would do to ask her here, to dinner and all that, without asking Mrs. Carteret, and making a regular business of it?' said Eleanor.

'Of course it would,' returned Mr. Baldwin. 'If you want to have Mrs. Hungerford here, and do not want to have Mrs.

Carteret, as I understand you that you do, you could not have a better opportunity. Now is your time. You have a cold, you can't go out, and you certainly cannot see company. Write your note, Nelly, and I'll take it. I want to see Mr. Carteret. You cannot have a better opportunity.'

'Let me see,' said Lady Davyntry, biting the top of her pen contemplatively; 'Mr. Dugdale is down at Oxford, isn't he?'

'Yes,' said her brother; 'gone to see his old tutor,—a fellow he is, but I forget his name,—and won't be back for three weeks.'

'Well, then, I *will* ask Margaret alone. I thought, if Mr. Dugdale had been at home, we might have asked him to come to dinner. But you won't mind seeing Mrs. Hungerford home, Fitz, will you? She could have the carriage, of course,

and go round by the road; but I am sure she would not like that.'

Mr. Baldwin was exceedingly complaisant and agreeable. So far from growling an assent in an undertone, sounding much more like a protest than an acquiescence, as is the usual manner of men with regard to the bosom friends of their sisters, he expressed his readiness to undertake the task of seeing Margaret home with a cheerful readiness quite beyond suspicion of its sincerity.

When Margaret had read the note, she twisted it in her fingers without speaking. Mr. Baldwin's attention wandered a little, though Mr. Carteret had opened one of the glass cases, and taken out a horrid object like an old-fashioned brooch with an areole of long spikes, and was expatiating upon it with great fervour.

He looked at Margaret; but her eyes

were turned from him, straying over the garden. At last he moved to where she was sitting.

‘You will grant my sister’s prayer,’ he said. ‘I know what is in the note. She really has a cold, Mrs. Hungerford. It will be a charity if you will go to her.—What do *you* say, sir?’

Mr. Carteret said nothing, for the ample reason that he had not the remotest idea of what Mr. Baldwin was talking about. When, however, that gentleman explained the matter, he gave it as his decided opinion that Margaret ought to go for Lady Davyntry’s sake and her own. A little change would do her good. She must not mope, the kind gentleman said; and he and Sibylla were but dull company now. She must find it dismal enough now that James was away. By the bye, did Margaret know how Mr. Fordham was? Had James found

him any better than he expected when he arrived at Oxford? Yes, yes, Margery must go—she moped too much; she did not even care for the specimens so much as she used to do.

‘Indeed I do, papa,’ said Margaret, rising suddenly from her seat and laying her hand on her father’s shoulder; ‘I care for them a great deal more—for everything that interests you, and that *you* care for.’

Her luminous eyes were softer and brighter than Mr. Baldwin had ever seen them. She had evidently been thinking of something in the past with which her father’s words had chimed in. He was waiting her decision with a strange feeling of suspense and anxiety, considering that the matter involved was of no greater moment than the question whether his sister’s friend, who had seen her yesterday, and would in all probability see her to-morrow, should

make up her mind to refrain from the luxury of seeing her to-day.

‘Do you, my dear?’ said Mr. Carteret. ‘That’s right; you will go, of course, then, and Foster shall fetch you this evening.—No, indeed, Mr. Baldwin, I could not think of your taking the trouble.’

But Mr. Baldwin insisted, subject to Mrs. Hungerford’s permission, that he would see her home. This permission she carelessly gave, and then left the room to prepare for her walk. The two men stood silent for a minute; then Mr. Carteret said, with a deep sigh,

‘Poor Margery! she has had plenty of trouble in her time. I often wonder whether she is going to have peace now. We can’t give that to our sons and daughters, Baldwin, or get it from them either.’

There was a sad desponding tone in Mr. Carteret’s voice. Now he was beginning

to understand something of the meaning and extent of the sorrow that had befallen his daughter—now, when the indelible stamp of its effect was set upon her changed face, upon her shrinking figure, upon her slow and unelastic movements.

She had had time now to feel the repose, the comfort, the respectability of the home to which she had come back, and yet there was no change in her beyond the release from mere bodily fatigue. The wan weariness which he had not seen at first, but had seen when James Dugdale directed his attention to it, was there still, unaltered; indeed, to the eye of a keen observer, it was deepened. In some cases, mere respite from physical labour does not produce the effect of mental repose. Margaret's case was one of those.

Mr. Baldwin did not reply to Mr. Carteret's observation; he walked towards the

window, and looked dreamily out, as Margaret had done. Presently she came back, wearing her sombre mantle and the close widow's bonnet of a period when *grand deuil*, in the Mary-Stuart fashion, was unknown.

'You will tell Mrs. Carteret, if you please, papa, I could not find her.'

'I will be sure to tell her,' said Mr. Carteret; 'and, Margery, I want you to observe Lady Davyntry's Angora cat very carefully, and bring me word whether she has one ring or two round the top of her tail. Don't forget this, my dear, for it is really an important point.'

'I'll be sure to remember it, papa,' said Margaret; and then she and Mr. Fitzwilliam Meriton Baldwin went out through the French window of Mr. Carteret's study, and took their way across the grassy terrace, through the lawn, to the little iron

gate which opened into the meadow-lands, through which the 'short cut' between Chayleigh and Davyntry lay.

In the first field beyond this gate a noble clump of beeches stood.

'That is a favourite point of view of Dugdale's,' said Mr. Baldwin. 'I have two sketches he made of those forest lords. Splendid trees they are. I love them.'

'And I hate them,' said Margaret.

He glanced at her in surprise. Her tone was bitter, and her face wore an angry scornful look. But it was scorn of herself that Margaret was feeling. There, under the shade of those trees, she had come suddenly upon her brother and Godfrey Hungerford; there the first incense of her worship of the false god had been offered up. She felt his glance, and instantly began to talk of Lady Davyntry's cold.

'The idea,' she thought indignantly,

‘of saying such a thing as that—of my betraying feelings to a stranger which it is impossible to explain.’

The first visit made by Margaret to Davyntry was the beginning of a series which contributed not a little to bringing about the changed aspect of things at Chayleigh, at the end of the first month of Margaret’s residence there. She was beginning to feel something like a revival of her youth. The cheerful society, the sense of being loved and valued; the action of time, so mighty, so resistless, when one is young; the future dim, indeed, but still in a great measure within her own control: these were all telling on the young widow.

At first she had suffered keenly from the remembrance of the past episodes in her life, which seemed to set a barrier between her and the well-regulated, spotlessly respectable social circle to which she

was restored; a social atmosphere in which shifts, contrivances, shady expedients for the procuring of shabby ends, were as unknown, as inconceivable, as the more violent roisterous vice with which she had also, and only too frequently, been brought into contact. At first, this sense of an existence, separate and apart from her present associates, oppressed Margaret strangely, and caused her to shrink away from the manifestations of Lady Davyntry's friendship with sudden coldness, quite inexplicable to the impulsive Eleanor, whose life was all so emphatically aboveboard.

There were times when, in the luxurious and picturesque drawing-room at Davyntry, whose treasures of old china and ivory caused Mrs. Carteret acute pangs of envy, Margaret felt the whole scene fade from before her eyes like a stage transformation, and some squalid room which she had once

inhabited rise up in its place, with its mingled wretchedness and recklessness; a horrid vision of dirty packs of cards, of whisky-bottles, and the reek of coarse tobacco; and the refined tones of Mr. Baldwin's voice would mingle strangely in her ears with the echo of loud oaths and coarse laughter.

At such times her face would harden, and the light would fade out of her eyes, and the grace would leave her form in some inexplicable way; and, if the cloud settled heavily, and she knew it was going to last, she would make some excuse to get away and return to her father's house and the society of Mrs. Carteret, to whom her moods, or indeed those of any human being in existence, except herself, were matters of perfect indifference.

Mr. Baldwin thought he understood the origin of these sudden changes in Margaret

Hungerford; and, though he had no knowledge of the past, he discerned the spirit of the young widow with the marvellous skill which has its rise in very perfect sympathy. When his sister spoke to him about her friend's strange manner at times, he entreated her not to notice it in any way.

‘She has had such troubles in her life, as, thank God, neither you nor I can understand, Nelly; and when this cloud comes over her, depend upon it, it is because the remembrance of them returns to her, made all the more real by the contrast here. Take no notice of it, and it will wear away in time.’

‘She seems to me, Fitzwilliam, as if she had some painful secret pressing on her mind. I don't mean, of course, any secret concerning herself, anything in her own life; but Margaret constantly gives me the impression of being a person in possession of

some knowledge unshared by any one else, and which she sometimes forgets, and then suddenly remembers.'

'It may be so,' said Mr. Baldwin slowly, and looking very uncomfortable. 'I hope not; I hope it is only the effect of the early trouble she has gone through.'

'I wonder how she will get on when she leaves Chayleigh,' said Lady Davyntry.

'When she leaves Chayleigh!' repeated her brother, surprised, for the intentions of Margaret had never been discussed in his presence.

Then Lady Davyntry told him what Margaret had said to her, and how she had asked her advice and her aid.

'I could not possibly advise her to remain all her life with that dreadful step-mother of hers, could I, Fitz? You can understand what Mrs. Carteret is in that relation, civil as she is to *you*. I really

think she imagines you entertain a profound sentiment for her; perfectly proper and Platonic, you know, but still profound; and I don't think Margaret's naturally active mind could endure the idleness of the life at Chayleigh, even if Mrs. Carteret were out of the question.'

'Idleness!' said Mr. Baldwin, 'what idleness? There is just the same kind of life to be had at Chayleigh, I suppose, as women, as ladies, lead everywhere else—the kind of life Margaret was born to. I can't see the matter in *that* light.'

'I daresay not, Fitz,' said Lady Davyntry, rather proud of the chance of offering a suggestion to this infallible and incomparable younger brother of hers. 'But I can. Margaret certainly was, as you say, born to lead the kind of life which all women of her position get through somehow; but then she was taken out of it very

young, and, whatever it was she did or suffered, you may be sure that it gave her mind a turn not to be undone. Of course, I don't mean to say she wants to go back to that again, whatever it was; but I am sure she must have some settled occupation to be happy. I do not think, when one's heart has been once crammed quite full of anything, be it joyful or sorrowful, one can stand a vacuum.' From which speech it will be made plain that Lady Davyntry did not cultivate her emotions at the expense of her good sense.

'You are right, Nelly; I see you are quite right. But what does her father say?'

'That I really cannot tell you; but I suppose what Mr. Carteret usually says, in any matter unconnected with birds, beasts, fishes, or insects—nothing. He and Margaret have a tacit understanding that Mrs.

Carteret and she are not exactly sympathetic, and he has a feeble desire that his daughter should be happy. Beyond that he really thinks nothing, and would have as much notion of the new life she wants to enter upon, as of the old life she has escaped from.'

'What does Dugdale think?'

'That I cannot tell you. Margaret never said a word about his opinion in connection with the matter. I don't think she likes him.'

'No,' said Mr. Baldwin, 'I don't think she does.'

'I asked her to come to me,' Lady Davyntry continued, 'and tried very hard to persuade her that I required the services of a *dame de compagnie*. But she laughed at me, and would not listen to me for a moment, though she told me she had once suggested to Mr. Dugdale that she should

ask me to take her, for the commendable purpose of spiting Mrs. Carteret. "Do you think I want to *play* at independence?" she said. "If you do, you are much mistaken. I won't have any more *shams*, please God, in my life. No, I am going to work in earnest." So I could not say any more. She may change her mind in six months, though I do not think she will.'

Mr. Fitzwilliam Meriton Baldwin left his sister to entertain a selection of the Croftons and the Crokers and the Willises, and betook himself to a solitary ramble. The question which he had asked himself when he had seen Margaret Hungerford but once had recurred to him very often since then. Now he asked himself if he might dare to hope that he had found the answer.

He did not deny to himself now that he loved Margaret Hungerford. He was

quite clear on that point; and he knew, too, that it was with an immortal and a worthy love. What did she mean? Was she to mean to him happiness—the realisation of a man's best and wisest dreams? Was she to mean this to him in time, or did that sombre past in her life, of which he knew nothing, interpose an impassable barrier between her and him? He thought of Margaret's frank unembarrassed manner towards him without discouragement; he never fancied she could feel anything for him yet; he perfectly comprehended that nothing was so utterly dead for her as love.

But he would have patience, he would wait; a resurrection morning might come; he would try to *win* such a prize as she would be, not by a *coup de main*, but by slow degrees, if so it might be. In the true humility of his mind, in the perfect

nobility of his soul, it never occurred to Mr. Baldwin to think of himself as a prize also worth the winning.

He had often laughed with his sister about the 'man-traps' set for him; but it was always Lady Davyntry, and not he, who had detected the devices prepared for the captivation and capture of Mr. Baldwin of the Deane.

It rarely happened that Fitzwilliam Baldwin thought about his wealth; his habits and tastes were simple, and his large property was well administered. He had been a rich man ever since he had come to years of manhood, and the fact had not the same significance for him which it assumes for those who come late to a long-looked-for inheritance, whose attractions are exaggerated by the aid of fancy.

But he began to think complacently of his wealth now; he began to see visions,

and to dream dreams; to think of the power he had to reverse all the former conditions of Margaret's life, let them have been what they might. At least he knew she had been unhappy; he could give her happiness, if unbounded love and respect, if the guarding her from every ill and care, if the holding her a sacred being, apart, to be seated in a shrine and worshipped, could give her happiness. This he could do, if she would but let him.

He knew that she had been poor, that she had now no means of her own. There was his wealth, which had never been very important to him before, and could never be important again if she would not in time take it from him. How he would lavish it upon her; how he would try, without annoying her in any way, to find out some of the features of her past experience, and efface them by the luxury

and honour in which he would envelop her! Fitzwilliam Baldwin had advanced very far in a dream of this kind before the end of the month. He had no longer any doubt of what this woman meant to him.

Shortly after, and sooner than his return was looked for, James Dugdale came back to Chayleigh, and found a letter awaiting him. It was from Hayes Meredith.

CHAPTER X.

THE LETTER FROM MELBOURNE.

‘BEFORE you receive this letter, my dear Dugdale,’ wrote Hayes Meredith, ‘you will have seen Mrs. Hungerford, and she will have told you all the news about me, in giving the history of herself—a history, by the bye, which has had a better ending than I expected, when first I made her out, according to your request.

‘She is not much given to talking, I fancy, to any one, and I dare say she will not let you know much about her wretched life out here; but I can tell you it was wretched; and when I came to know her, and understand how superior a woman she

is to the generality of women, such as I have known them, I was really grateful to you for giving me the chance of serving her. I don't think I was much more obliged to you in my life, and I *have* owed you a turn or two.

‘Hungerford was a regular blackguard, and an irredeemable snob as well, and she was only to be congratulated heartily on his death. The mode of it was rather horrible, to be sure; but if he had not been knocked on the head in the bush, the chances are he would have been hanged; and there's something to choose between the two, at all events.

‘She is an interesting young woman, and I was sincerely glad to do her all the service in my power, which was not much, after all. I should like to know what becomes of her. I hope she has better days to see than any she lived through here; and

I hope you will write to me when you can.

‘But my letter does not solely concern Mrs. Hungerford. I have a selfish purpose in writing to you also, and the explanation of it needs some detail. You know that I am, and that I have been for some years, what I may safely call a prosperous man; and though I have a large family to provide for—five of them now (they were seven, but two little ones early succumbed to the climate)—I have never found that same very difficult to do. My children are all well, hearty, jolly, sturdy children, with the exception of our eldest boy—you have seen him, you may remember—Robert. He is not exactly sickly, but he is not strong; but it is less his bodily than his mental health that troubles his mother and myself.

‘The boy is not contented, not happy,

not a born colonial, like the rest; he has ideas and fancies other than theirs; he has an unruly temper, a quick impressionable brain, and a great aptitude for the graces, refinements, and luxuries of life, which—as I need not tell you it has had no chance of cultivation here—must be natural to him.

‘His mother and I are not people to have a favourite among our children; it is share and share alike with them all, in affection as in everything else; but Robert is a discord somehow, and captious—in short, very hard to manage—and I have not the time to devote to an exceptional person in the family.

‘He has a great notion that he is very superior to his brothers—quite an unfounded one—and thinks he should do no end of wonderful things in England, if he had the chance, by which, of course, he

means the money. This I can give him; and as there is no doubt he can get a better education in England than here, and should his projects fail, or should he get tired of them, he can come back whenever he pleases, and still find a corner for himself here, I am quite disposed to let him try his own plans out.

‘The others are true colonials; they have not the least desire to see the old country until they can do so in independent manhood; but I can plainly perceive that, for his own sake, and that of all the household, Robert must be allowed to have his own way, as far as it lies in my power to give it him.

‘There is some prospect of an improved and accelerated communication between us and England, and should it be realised by the spring of next year, I will probably bring the boy to England myself, and thus

see you once more in this world, which I never had any hope of doing a little while ago.

‘My wife does not like, nor, to tell the truth, do I, the notion of a whole year being taken out of our span of life together, which it must be if I make my proposed voyage; but neither does she like the idea of her son travelling alone to a strange country, and commencing his career without the assistance and the comfort of his father’s presence and guidance in those important “first steps.” We shall see, when the time comes, which of these feelings will prevail.

‘In the mean time, my dear Dugdale, I rely on your friendship, aided by your experience of English life, and all the changes in public opinion and manners which have taken place since my time, to guide me in this matter, to tell me what

it will be best for me to do for and with the boy.

‘Robert is not ill educated, in as far as the limits of our colonial possibilities extend; but his education will aid him little in English life, and towards that his inclinations set.

‘Turn all I have said over, and write to me concerning it. Then, by the time I get home, if I ever get home, and, if I do not, by the time I send my boy home, you will have made up your mind, which, in a matter of this kind will be, as it ought to be, equivalent to making up mine, as to the proper course to be pursued.

‘With all his faults, Robert will interest you, my dear Dugdale, I am certain; in his industry, his ambition, and his adaptive nature you will find something to admire.

‘I have almost forgotten the ways of

the old country, so completely have I turned—not my mind only, but my heart and my tastes—to the life of the new. I daresay you remember the days in which I was rather a “buck,” ran heavy accounts with our common tailor, and knew, or pretended to know, a lot about good dinners and wines.

‘Ask Mrs. Hungerford what sort of rough and gruff old fellow I am now, and you will understand, from her description, the difficulty I should have in getting into, or even comprehending, the ways of the other side of the world again. But, remembering what I once did know, and thinking of what I have heard and seen since I ceased to know, I think Robert is cut out for success in England. Mind, he will not have it *all* to do unaided; he will have a little money, enough to keep him respectable, to back him.

‘I feel I am unwise in thus talking to you so much beforehand of Robert—time enough when we meet, as I hope we shall do; but I have a notion you might hit upon some plan for him for the future more easily and successfully if you had an idea of the sort of person he is.

‘If his mother could see this letter, and recognise the very moderate colours in which I have sketched her eldest son, I don’t think I should hear the last of it between this and the date at which I and he are to start for England. I am such a dolt in these matters, I do not rightly know what to ask you to think about, or advise me upon; but you will know generally. Shall it be private tuition, or public school, or business life at once combined with education?

‘My other boys never give me the least anxiety. I know they will take to the

sheep-walk or the counting-house as readily as to their food, and plod on as comfortably and as cheerily as possible. And, indeed, while I am anxious about Robert, it would be giving you an unfair impression to say that I am uneasy about him. I am *not that*; but he is so different a stamp, I hardly know how to manage him.

‘I have written all this to you with as much ease and confidence as if we were smoking together in the old quarters, velvet-coated and slippers, as in the time I remember so well. I wonder if you—who have remained in England, to whom, at all events, life cannot have brought such physical changes as it has brought to me—remember it half so well as I do.

‘There are hours even yet, when I am alone and thinking, when all that has intervened seems utterly unreal, and those old days, with their old associations, the

one true and living period in my life. Do you remember the day after you, poor little shivering youngster as you were then, came to school, when I was a great hulking fellow, and my mother, God bless her! came to visit me, and, being taken by old Maddox to see the playground, was just in time to behold me tumble from the very top of the forbidden pear-tree and break my arm?

‘I can see her face and hear her voice now, as plainly as if I could see the one and hear the other by going into the next room. And how you cried! Well, well, I suppose something of the boy remains until the last in every man’s nature, and that more of it has the chance of remaining in our lives here than in yours at home.

‘The progress of this place is extraordinary, and there are rumours of discoveries in metals, and so forth, which, if verified,

will give it very great impetus. I don't mind them much; they don't disturb and they don't excite me even in this go-ahead colonial life. I carry my old steadiness about with me, and am go-ahead in my own business only.

‘There is much in the political and social world here which would interest, but little which would please you, unless you are very much changed.

‘I never could arrive at a very clear notion of you from Mrs. Hungerford; she was not communicative on any point, and she never told me anything about you, except that your health was delicate, which I could have told her from your letter. The sort of life we lead here is certainly calculated to give one the power of feeling acutely for a man to whom bodily exertion is forbidden; but you were always a patient fellow.’

The letter was a very long one ; the above is but an extract from it. James Dugdale had recognised the handwriting of his friend with pleasure, and had opened the letter with delighted eagerness. It would tell him something of Margaret ; it would give him an insight into the troubles of her life ; it would give him a clue to the enigma which lived and moved within his sight and his reach daily.

But his calculations were overthrown ; he perceived at once that he was destined to gain no further knowledge of Margaret's past life from Hayes Meredith. The disappointment was so keen that at first he hardly had power to feel the interest in his friend's communication which it was calculated to evoke ; and, when he had read half through the letter, he returned to the earlier portion in which Margaret was mentioned, and reperused it.

‘I wish he had even told me more about Hungerford’s death,’ said James Dugdale to himself. He was lying on a couch drawn close to the window of his own room, and he allowed the letter to drop by his side, and his gaze fixed itself on the landscape as he spoke. ‘I wish he had said more about him. What *were* the circumstances of his death? The little he says here, and one sentence of Margaret’s—“when I first heard that my husband had been murdered by the black fellows”—comprise all I know—all any one knows—for her father would not mention his name, and I verily believe has forgotten that the man ever existed. I wish he had told me more.’

He resumed the letter and read it again, this time through to the end, steadily and attentively.

Then he said slowly, and with a despondent shake of the head:

‘I am very much afraid my old friend’s son, Robert, is a bad boy.’

James Dugdale had not been more than an hour at Chayleigh when he had read Hayes Meredith’s letter. His return was unexpected, and he had been told by the servant who admitted him that the ‘ladies’ were out. This was true, inasmuch as neither was in the house, but incorrect in so far as it seemed to imply that they were together.

Mrs. Carteret had departed in her pony-carriage, arrayed in handsome apparel, the materials and tints whereof were a clever combination of the requirements of the season then expiring and the season just about to begin, with a genteel recognition of the fact that an individual connected with the family had died within a period during which society would exact a costume commemorative of the circumstance. Mrs. Car-

teret had gone out, in high good humour with herself, and her dress, and her pony-carriage, with her smart servant, her pretty harness, her visiting-list, and the state of her complexion.

This latter was a subject of unusual self-gratulation, for Mrs. Carteret's complexion was changeable : it needed care, and, on the whole, it caused her more uneasiness, and occupied more of her attention, than any other mundane object. She was by no means a plain woman, and she had once been pretty—but her prettiness had been of a sunny, commonplace, exasperating, self-complacent kind ; and now that it existed no longer, the expression of self-satisfaction was rather increased than lessened, for there was no delicacy of feature and no genuine bloom to divert attention from it.

If Mrs. Carteret believed anything

firmly, it was that she was indisputably and incomparably the best, and very nearly the handsomest, of created beings; and she had a way of talking solemnly about her personal appearance,—taking careful note of its every peculiarity and variation, and bestowing upon it the minutest and most vexatious care,—which was annoying to her friends in general, and to James Dugdale in particular.

Mrs. Carteret was a woman who would be totally unmoved by any kind or degree of human suffering brought under her notice, but who would speak of a cold in her own head, or a pimple on her own face, as a calamity calculated to alarm and grieve the entire circle of her acquaintance. She was almost amusing in her transparent, engrossing, uncontrolled selfishness—amusing, that is, to strangers. It was not so pleasant to those who lived in

the house or came into constant contact with her ; they failed to perceive the humorous side of her character.

Her husband, who, with all his oddity and absence of mind, was not destitute of a degree of tact, in which there was a *soupeçon* of cunning, and which he aired whenever there was any risk of his dearly-prized 'quiet life' being endangered, had invented a kind of vocabulary of compliments of simulated solicitude and exaggerated sympathy, which was wonderfully efficacious, and really gave him very little trouble. To be sure he was rather apt to adhere to it with a parrot-like fidelity, and on her 'pale days' to congratulate Mrs. Carteret on her bloom, and on her 'dull days' to discover that it was difficult to leave her, she talked so charmingly—'but those new specimens must be seen to,' &c. &c.

But these were mere casualties, and, as

intense vanity is frequently accompanied by dense stupidity, they never endangered the good understanding between the husband—who was not nearly so tired of his wife as a more clever and practical man must inevitably have been—and the wife, whose wildest imaginings could never have extended to the possibility of any one's finding her less than perfectly admirable, or her husband otherwise than supremely enviable.

In the days when Mrs. Carteret had been pretty, her prettiness was of the corset-maker's model description, a prettiness which consisted in straight features, a high and well-defined colour, and a figure which required, and could bear, a good deal of tight-lacing.

Women did lace tightly in the golden prime of Mrs. Carteret's days, and she was not behindhand in that or any other fashion;

indeed, she had a profound and almost religious respect for fashion, and she had, in consequence, a stiffness of figure suggestive of her being obliged to turn round 'all at once' when it was necessary for her to turn at all, which gave her whole person an air and attitude of stiff and starched stupidity, highly provoking to an observer endowed with taste.

The paying of morning visits was an occupation especially congenial to Mrs. Carteret's taste, and well suited to her intellectual capacity, which answered freely to the demand made on it on such occasions. She was not by any means a vulgar gossip, but she possessed a satisfactory enough knowledge of the affairs and 'ways' of all the 'visitable' people within reach, and she found discussing them a very agreeable pastime.

She was not so stupid a woman as to be

unaware that she and her affairs were discussed in their turn ; but her invariable conviction that, in all respects, she was a faultless being, rendered the knowledge painless.

Thus, when Mrs. Carteret set out on a round of visits, in the aforesaid equipage and in her customary choice apparel, she was as happy as it was in her not expansive nature to be.

All the happier that Margaret did not accompany her, for, though Margaret's heavy mourning dress was not a bad foil to the taste and elegance, as she believed, of her own, people were apt to be too much interested in, too curious about, the young widow—always rather an interesting object—for the fancy of Mrs. Carteret, who did not admire her stepdaughter herself, and to whom it was neither intelligible nor pleasant that other people should admire her.

As to Lady Davyntry and Mr. Baldwin (for she had been forced to include the brother with the sister in the category of Margaret's friends), she had, as we have seen, resolved to find her account in *that* intimacy, and she did not trouble herself about it.

At the same hour in which Mrs. Carteret was giving way to her self-complacent sentiments, Margaret was taking leave of Lady Davyntry. She had been at Davyntry since the morning, and was then going home. Mr. Baldwin was ready, according to his now almost invariable custom, to offer her his escort.

It was quite the end of October, a soft, shadowy, beautiful day, the air full of the faint perfume of the fallen leaves and of the golden gleam of the sunshine, which lingered as if regretfully. Lady Davyntry accompanied Margaret to the little garden-

gate which opened into the demesne, and then took leave of her.

When her friend and her brother had left her, she stood for a few minutes looking after them, then walked up the garden-path, saying to herself:

‘I hope I shall be able to hold my tongue about it, and not spoil all by letting her see that such an idea has ever entered into my head!’

In many respects Lady Davyntry was a sensible woman.

Margaret and her companion went on their way, slowly. They were talking of a projected journey on the part of Mr. Baldwin. He was going to visit his Scotch estates.

‘I have not been much there,’ he said; ‘my time has mostly been passed abroad. My longest stay at the Deane was when poor Nelly was there with Sir Richard ;

and, of course, I can't expect her to go back to the scene of all her trouble so soon; so I must go alone.'

'Can't you?' said Margaret, with a sudden flush on her cheek; 'I should have thought it would have been her greatest, her best consolation. But people feel so differently,' she said absently; and then made some remark about the beauty of the day. Her companion wondered at her strange manner. He took the hint to change the subject.

'Shall you be long away?' Margaret asked him.

He would have been only too happy to tell her that the duration of his absence would depend entirely on her pleasure—to tell her what was the truth, that he was leaving her now because he loved her, and hoped the day might come when he might try to make her love him; when respect for

her position should no longer bind him to silence.

He felt he could not remain in her vicinity during the time that must elapse before he could venture to acknowledge his feelings, without the risk of offending her, perhaps losing her by their premature betrayal, and he had determined to go to Scotland and remain there until the time should be near when she thought of leaving Chayleigh.

Then he would return and take his chance. If she would accept the love, the home, the fortune he had to offer her, he almost dreaded to think what happiness life—which had never been adorned with any very brilliant hues of imagination by him before—would have in store for him.

When she asked him, in her clear, sweet voice, whose tones were to-day as pure and untroubled as if she had never spoken any

words but those of the gladness which should so well have beseeemed her youth, that careless question, he felt all the difficulty of the restraint he had imposed upon himself.

‘I am not quite certain,’ he replied; ‘I daresay I shall find a great deal to do at the Deane, and a good deal will be expected from me in the way of sociability—a tribute, by the way, which I render very unwillingly. I—I suppose you will not leave Chayleigh this winter?’

‘I don’t think my father has any intention of going anywhere,’ Margaret said; ‘and I shall remain with him until I leave him “for good”—as people say when they leave for the equal chance of good or evil. I believe, too, there is a chance of my brother’s coming home.’

‘Indeed,’ said Mr. Baldwin; ‘that is good news. I didn’t hear anything of it.’

‘No. I told Lady Davyntry this evening, before you came in. I should like to be here when Haldane comes’—and her face was overcast by the mournful, musing expression he knew and loved so well. ‘He and I quarrelled before he went away—but I suppose he will not keep that up with me *now*.’

She looked round with a forlorn kind of smile actually painful to see. In it there was an appeal to the dreariness of her lot, to the terrible blight which had settled on her youth, against harsh judgment of the wilfulness and folly which had led her to such a doom, inexpressibly affecting.

The strong restraint, the habitual patience which she maintained over all her emotions, seemed to forsake her quite suddenly. Her companion might have taken it as a good omen for him that it was in

his company alone the control was loosened; but he did not think of himself, only of her.

The forlorn smile was succeeded by an ominous twitching of the lips, and the next moment Margaret had covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

Mr. Baldwin watched her with inexpressible pangs of love and pity. He dared not speak. What could he say? He knew nothing, though he could surmise much, of the past which had given rise to this burst of emotion.

To try to console, was to seem to question her. He stood by her in the keenest distress, and could only entreat her to remember that it was all over now. The paroxysm passed over as he uttered the words for the second time.

Margaret took her hands away from her face, and looked at him, and there was

an angry sparkle in her eye which he had never seen before, but which he thought very beautiful.

‘You don’t believe what you say,’ she said quickly, and walking on hurriedly as she spoke; ‘you don’t believe what you say. You know there are things in life which are never over—sorrows and experiences which time can never change. When you say to me that it is all over now, you say what is not true, and you know it, or you guess it; you might know it if you would. Do you think I am like other women, like your sister, for instance, with nothing but pure and sanctifying grief for the dead, to ripen my mind? Do you think I am like her, or like any other woman, whose quiet life, however sad, has been led in decency, and has been sheltered and guarded by the protections which may be found in honest poverty? Do you think I can come

home here, and find myself once more among the people and places I knew when I was a girl, and not feel like a cheat? I tell you the Past is *not* all over; it will stand as long as I live between me and other people—not my employers, for there will be no associations in their case; but every one who knew me once, and who knows me now. Why does no one speak to *me*, in even a casual way, of the places I have seen, or the people I have been amongst? Do you think I imagine it is because they are unwilling to awaken a slumbering sorrow? No! You know, and I know, it is because they feel that I have seen sights unfit for women's eyes, and heard words unfit for women's ears; and can I ever forget it while others remember it whenever they see me? No, no, no! I never, never can!'

She pressed her small hands together

and slightly wrung them; a gesture habitual to her in distress, but which he had never seen before. He caught her right hand in his, and drew it within his arm. She walked on with him, but was, as he knew, almost unconscious of his presence.

How he loved her! how he hated the dead man who had caused her to suffer thus! A young man himself, and she no more than a girl; and yet how little of the aspect, how little of the sense of youth there was about either as they walked together through the woods and fields that day!

This sudden revelation of Margaret's feelings brought a sense of despair to Fitzwilliam Baldwin. If the spectre of the past haunted her thus, if she were divided from all the present by this drear shade, then was she divided from him too.

How should he hope to lay the ghost

which thus walked abroad in the noonday beside her? Had he had a little more experience, had not Margaret been so completely a new type of womanhood to him, had he had a little less humility, he would have taken courage from the fact that she had given utterance to such feelings before him.

That he had seen Margaret as no other human being had ever seen her, ought to have been an indication to him that, however unconsciously to her, he was to Margaret what no other human being was. The time was to come in which he was to make that discovery; but that time was not yet, and he left her that day with profound discouragement.

She recovered herself after a little, and when they reached the confines of the demesne of Chayleigh they were talking in their ordinary manner of ordinary subjects,

but Margaret's arm still rested on that of her companion, nor was it removed until they reached the little gate between the wood and the pleasaunce.

As they crossed the lawn, Margaret's dress swept the fallen leaves rustling after her. She was very near the house now, and the sound caught James Dugdale's ear as he lay on his couch in the window. He raised himself on his elbow and looked out. The letter from Hayes Meredith was still in his hand. Margaret looked up and greeted him with a smile.

The next moment she was in the verandah, and he heard her laugh as she spoke to her father. Her voice thrilled his heart as it had done on the first day of her return. Her laugh had something like the old sound in it, which he had not heard since she was a girl. Good God! how long ago! She was looking better than when he

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CHAPTER XI.

FOOLS' PARADISE.

SHORTLY after the incidents narrated in the preceding chapter, Mr. Baldwin left Davyntry. His sister maintained to the last the strong constraint she had put upon herself. She had seen with a genuine disinterested pleasure, for which the world in general might fairly have been excused for not giving her credit, that her young favourite had captivated her only brother.

Without being a very wise, a very witty, or in any marked way a very superior woman, Eleanor Davyntry possessed certain admirable and estimable qualities. Not the least remarkable, and perhaps the most rare of these, was disinterestedness. This vir-

tue was in her: it did not arise from circumstances. She was not disinterested because she was rich,—the amount of wealth in people's possession makes no difference in their appreciation of and desire for wealth,—and Lady Davyntry 'had no nonsense about her.'

She thoroughly understood the value of her money as a means towards the enjoyment of the happiness which she acknowledged to be hers; but it never occurred to her for a moment to consider her own interests in the question of her brother's future. That he would probably marry at some time she looked upon as certain; and the inheritance of the Deane from one so much younger than herself would not have been a hopeful subject of speculation, had she been a person who would have speculated upon it at all. Even if she had had children, it would have been all the same

to Lady Davyntry. She would not have been covetous for them any more than for herself. She had thought rather nervously, since Sir Richard's death had left her more dependent on her brother for the love and companionship without which life would have been intolerable to a woman of her disposition, of the probabilities of Mr. Baldwin's marriage.

Lady Davyntry had her prejudices; one of them was against Scotchwomen. She hoped he would not marry a Scotchwoman, therefore she had never encouraged her brother's residence at the Deane.

'It is not so much their ankles and wrists,' she had assured Sir Richard, when he had remonstrated with her for 'snubbing' a florid young lady who hailed from Aberdeen; and did it in a voice which set Lady Davyntry's teeth on edge, and made her backbone quiver, 'as it is their minds

and their ways. Of course, the way they speak is very awful, and the way they move is worse; but I could stand all that, I daresay. But what I cannot stand is their coarse way of looking at things, and the hardness of them in general. And as for flirting! *You* may think it is not dangerous, because it is all romping and hoydenism; but I don't want a sister-in-law of Miss MacAlpine's pattern, and so I tell you.'

'Hadn't you better tell Baldwin so, my dear Nelly,' the reasonable baronet had made answer. '*I* don't want a MacAlpine importation into the family either; but, after all, it's *his* business, not mine.'

'No, no,' said the astute Nelly; 'I am not quite so stupid as to warn any man against a particular woman of whom he has hitherto taken no special notice. That would be just the way to make him notice

her, and that would be playing her game for her. I am not really afraid of the fair Jessie; Fitzwilliam can see her wrists, and her ankles too, quite as plainly as I can; and I fancy he suffers rather more acutely from her accent. I shall limit my interference to getting him away from the Deane.'

Other and sadder preoccupations soon after claimed Lady Davyntry, and Miss Jessie MacAlpine was forgotten. And now, when her brother spoke of leaving her to return to the Deane, she remembered the young woman and her mosstrooper-like accomplishments without a shade of apprehension.

'My darling Margaret has made my mind quite easy on *that* point, at all events,' thought Eleanor, as Mr. Baldwin imparted to her some of his intentions for the benefit of his tenantry and estate. 'Whether she

cares for him or not, whether good or evil is to be the result,—and I believe all will go well with them both,—he is safe in such an attachment.'

When her brother had left her, Eleanor thought long and happily over it all. Of his feelings she did not entertain a doubt, and her keen feminine perception had begun to discern in Margaret certain symptoms which led her to hope that for her too the dawn of a fair day was at hand. If she had known more of the young widow's inner life, if she had had a clearer knowledge of her past, Lady Davyntry would have hoped less and feared more. But her ignorance prevented the discouragement of fear, and her natural enthusiasm aided the impulses of hope; and she saw visions and dreamed dreams which were pure and beautiful, for they were all of the happiness and the good of others.

Thus Margaret's sadness and silence, the gloom which sometimes settled heavily over her, did not grieve her watchful friend. If only she loved, or should come to love, Fitzwilliam Baldwin, all this should be changed. All the darkness should pass away, and a life adorned with all that wealth could lend, enriched with all that love could give, should open before the woman whose feet had hitherto trodden such weary ways. Lady Davyntry pleased herself with fancies of all she should do to increase the happiness of that splendid visionary household at the Deane.

If Lady Davyntry could have known what were Margaret's thoughts just at the time when Mr. Baldwin went away, she would have felt some discouragement, though not so much as a person less given to enthusiasm, and to the raising of a fancy to the rank and importance of a hobby.

She had never realised any of the painful features of Mrs. Hungerford's past life; she had never tried to realise them. Her mind was not of an order to which the realisation of circumstances entirely out of the sphere of her experience was possible, and she never speculated upon them.

In a different way, and for quite another class of reason, Lady Davyntry had arrived at a state of mind similar to that of Mr. Carteret, who regarded the blissful fact of his son-in-law's death as not only the termination, but the consignment to oblivion, of all the misery his existence had occasioned.

'Of course she is low at times,' thought Lady Davyntry; 'that is only natural. After all, she must feel herself out of her place at Chayleigh, with that detestable woman. But that will not last; and she

will be all the brighter and the happier when Fitz has her safely at home.'

The world would have found it hard to understand that Mr. Baldwin's only sister—the great, rich, enviable, to-be-captured-if-possible Mr. Baldwin's sister—should desire so ardently the marriage of her brother with a person who had no fortune, no claim to personal distinction, and—a *story*. Horrible dowry for a woman! Better any insignificance, however utter.

And Margaret? While Mr. Baldwin was attending to the long-neglected demands, undergoing active persecution at the hands of a neighbourhood resolved on intimacy, and longing, with all the strength of his heart, for the sight of Margaret's pale face and the sound of her thrilling voice—while his sister was building castles in the air for him to tenant—what of Mar-

garet? What of her who was the centre, so unconsciously to herself, of all these hopes and speculations?

She was perhaps farther just then than she had ever been from a mood which was likely to dispose her towards their realisation. She had been disturbed rather than affected by the perusal of Hayes Meredith's letter. It had immediately succeeded to the outburst of emotion to which she had yielded in the presence of Mr. Baldwin, and for which she had afterwards taken herself severely to task; and it had upset her hard-won equanimity.

She was ashamed of herself, angry with herself, when she found out how much she desired that the past should be utterly forgotten. She had had to bear it all, and she had borne it, not so badly on the whole; but she did not want any reference to it; she shrunk from any external asso-

ciation with it as from a physical pain. Her reluctance to encounter any such association had strangely increased within the past few weeks.

She did not know, she did not ask herself, why. Was she ungrateful because she had felt intense reluctance to read Hayes Meredith's letter? Had she forgotten, had she ceased to thank him for all he had done to lighten her lot? Was she so cold, so 'shallow-hearted,' as to think, as many a vulgar-minded woman would have thought, that her account with the man who had succoured her in a strange land was closed with the cheque which her father had given her to be sent to him, in payment of the money he had lent her?

No, Margaret Hungerford was not ungrateful; but there was a sore spot in her heart which something—she did not ask what—was daily making sorer; the letter

had touched it, and she shrunk with keen unexplained anguish from the touch. She lay awake the whole night after she had read the letter from Melbourne, and it seemed to her that she lived all the old agonies of despair, rage, humiliation, and disgust over again.

It chanced that the next day James Dugdale was ill. This was so common an occurrence that no one thought much about it. James was familiar with suffering, and it was the inevitable penalty of fatigue. Not for him was the healthy sense of being tired, and of refreshing rest. Fatigue came to him with pain and fever, with racked limbs, and irritable nerves, and terrible depression. His journey had tired him, and he lay all day on the couch placed in the window of his room.

Hither came Mrs. Carteret frequently, fussily, but genuinely kind, and Mr. Bald-

win, to say some friendly words, and feel the truest compassion for the strong man thus imprisoned in his weak frame. Hither, later in the day, and much to the surprise of James Dugdale, came Margaret. He had thought she had gone to Davyntry, and said so. She reddened, a little angrily, as she replied,

‘No: I have not been out. You seem to think I must always go to Davyntry.’

‘Not *I*, indeed, Margaret,’ said James, with a smile; ‘but I think *they* do. Since I have been away, I understand you have been constantly at Davyntry, and I am very glad to hear it; it is good for you and for Lady Davyntry also.’

‘Perhaps so; she is very kind,’ said Margaret absently. ‘At all events, I am not there to-day, as you see, and I am not going there, or anywhere, but I will sit here with you, if I may.’

She turned on him one of her rare, winning smiles—a smile far more beautiful, he thought, than any her girlhood had been decked in. She drew a low chair into the bow of the window, beside his couch, and sat down. Between him and the light was her graceful figure, and her clear pale face, with its strangely-contrasted look of youth and experience.

‘Are you really going to give up all the afternoon to me?’ said James, in delight.

‘I really am. I will read to you, or we can talk, just as you like. I suppose you don’t feel any great fancy for turning tutor to me over again, though I see all my old school-books religiously preserved on your book-shelves,’ she said, glancing round at the well-stocked walls of the room, which had been the schoolroom in the days when Haldane and she had been James’s pupils.

‘I have kept every remembrance of that time, Margaret,’ said James.

There was a tone in his voice which might have been a revelation to her, had she heard it, but she did not. She smiled again, and said :

‘You had a troublesome pupil. I am in a good mood to-day, as I used to say long ago, and I want to talk to you about this.’

She took Hayes Meredith’s letter out of her pocket as she spoke.

James Dugdale kept silence, looking at her. ‘Is she going to tell me the story of her life?’ he thought. ‘Am I going at last to learn something of the history of this woman whom I love?’

Margaret did not speak for some moments ; she looked at the letter in silence. Then she unfolded it, and said :

‘I am glad you let me read this letter

for myself, James' (she had dropped into the habit of calling him by his name); 'there are some hard things in it, but they are *true*—and so, better spoken, no matter how hard they may be. But let us pass them over, they are said of the dead.'

Her face hardened, and she turned it away from him. James Dugdale laid his thin hand on her arm.

'Margaret,' he said, 'you know I would not have given you that letter to grieve you. I was thinking so much of what Meredith says of himself and his son that I forgot the allusion to—'

'I know, I know,' she said hurriedly; 'don't say his name; I never do.'

The admission was a confidence. She was breaking down the barrier of reserve between them. She trusted him. She might come to like him yet. The friendship at

least of the woman he loved might yet come to gild this man's lonely life. It would be much to him to know that she forgave him; and there was something in her manner now so different from anything that had ever been there formerly, that he began to hope she had really forgiven him.

In his quiet life, James Dugdale had contrived to attain, with very little aid from experience, to a tolerable amount of comprehension of human nature, and he understood that Margaret's practically-enforced conviction, that he had been unerringly right in all he had suspected and predicted of the fate in store for her, in her marriage, had not made her more inclined to pardon the interference on his part which she had so bitterly resented. But this was all over now, he did not know why; he felt it, he did not understand it.

Was it that the natural elasticity of youth was asserting its power—that Margaret was regaining her spirits, was throwing off the burden of the past, and, with it, all the feelings which had obscured the brightness and injured the gentleness of her nature? This was the most probable explanation; if, indeed, there was any other, it did not present itself as an alternative to James Dugdale. While he was thinking thus, she began to speak again in a hurried tone:

‘I should like to tell you now, James, because I would rather not have to refer to the matter again, that I know how kind you were to me, and how right in everything you said, and how hard you tried to save me. Yes, yes; let me speak,’ she went on, and tears, seldom seen in her eyes, stood in them now. ‘I could not again; let me speak now. You tried,

James, I know ; but you could not succeed. It was from myself I needed to be saved. Never think that you could have done anything more than you did ; indeed you could not. Nothing could have saved me.'

She was trembling now, even as the hand which he laid on hers, unnoticed, was trembling. Her lustrous eyes were wet, and the emotion in her face made it quite beautiful. James Dugdale did not attempt to speak ; he looked at her, and his heart was wrung with pity.

'It *had* to be, James, and it is done with, as much as it ever can be in this world, in which there is no release from consequences of our own acts. And now'—she raised her head, she released her hand, she was regaining her composure, the momentary expansion was past, as he felt, and he had learned nothing!—'let us

talk of your friend, who was so kind to me, and retains so kind a recollection of me. What do you think of all he says?'

'I think badly of it,' said James, as he leaned back on his couch again, and adopted the tone she had given to their conversation. 'I fear Robert Meredith is a bad boy.'

'So do I,' said Margaret. 'I have seen him, though not often, and I never saw a boy—almost a child—whom I disliked so much. He is a handsome fellow, but selfish, heartless, and sly. His very cleverness was revolting to me, and I suspect the feeling of dislike between us was mutual; he has an American-like precocity about him which I detest. His little brothers, rough colonial children as they are, are infinitely more to be liked than he is. Of course you must do as Mr. Meredith asks you; but if you will credit my judgment—and, all

things considered, I am rather daring in asking you to do so—you will not undertake anything like personal charge of Robert Meredith.'

'I will certainly take your advice in the matter, Margaret; you *know* the boy. I fancy I had better urge Meredith to bring him to England himself, if it is determined that he is to come. Tell me as much as you remember about the boy, and all the family. I remember Mrs. Meredith a pretty, active, pert kind of girl—strong and saucy—a capital wife for him, I should think.'

'I daresay,' Margaret answered carelessly; 'I did not know much of her.'

Then their conversation turned on the career and circumstances of Hayes Meredith, with which this story has no concern. In aftertime James Dugdale remembered that day as one of the happiest of his life.

They were quite uninterrupted until late in the evening. Mrs. Carteret had carried off to a dinner-party her reluctant husband, who would have infinitely preferred to superintend the dinner of a peculiarly fine spider—whose proceedings he was watching just then, and whose larder was largely provided with the last unwary flies of the expiring autumn.

Margaret and James Dugdale dined alone. She was in good spirits on the occasion ; she had almost lost the painful impression produced by Hayes Meredith's letter, by talking it over with James ; and between herself and him there reigned harmony and unreserve which had had no previous existence. James had never seen her look so nearly beautiful ; he had never seen her so kind, so gentle to him.

The hours passed over him in a kind of trance-like spell of pleasure. Margaret

talked as he had never imagined she could talk. He had soon recognised that her character was hardened and strengthened by the trials she had endured ; but until this day he had not known that her intellect had grown and brightened in proportion.

They read together Haldane's letters to his old friend, and Margaret found in them many a kindly mention of her. Her brother would know of her arrival in England at about this time.

‘ You must promise to tell me what he says, James, if it is not something very disagreeable indeed.’

And James promised.

From that day Margaret was a less unhappy woman than before. The first effect produced on her by Meredith's letter returned when she went to Davyntry, after Mr. Baldwin's departure, and was

more than ever warmly greeted by her friend.

‘I don’t think I could bear Fitzwilliam’s absence if I had not your society,’ Lady Davyntry said to her ; and, fond and flattering as the words were, there was, not in them, but in the mood in which she listened to them, something that hurt Margaret.

The young widow’s pride was for ever rebelling against the unshared knowledge of the experiences through which she had passed. Eleanor talked to her incessantly of her brother, of the Deane, of his occupations, his neighbours, and his popularity. The theme did not weary Margaret ; and Lady Davyntry accepted her unflagging attention as a delightful omen.

‘She misses him ; I am sure she misses him,’ was her pleased mental comment.

‘I hardly expected Margaret to remain

so long at Davyntry *to-day*,' said Mrs. Carteret to James Dugdale, as the family party were assembled in the drawing-room at Chayleigh.

James observed the emphasis, and replied:

‘Indeed; why not?’

‘Mr. Baldwin is not there, you know, and I fancy he is the great attraction.’

James made her no reply. He fully understood the spiteful animus of the observation, but he also admitted its terrible probability; not in the present—he did not take so superficial a view of Margaret’s character as that would have implied—but a thrill of fear for the future came over him, troubling his Fools’ Paradise. In a little while Margaret came in, looking as tranquil as usual, and, in her accustomed manner of placid, unalterable calm,—the bearing she always opposed to the masked

battery of Mrs. Carteret's insinuations and insolences,—answered the questions put to her.

When James Dugdale was alone that night he took himself to task, in no gentle manner. He knew he had nothing to expect beyond the unexpected boon of kindness and confidence she had already extended to him; and yet the thought that another might again stand nearer to Margaret than he, struck him with an anguish almost as keen as the first torment had been. He had doubted that fate could bring him anything very hard to bear again, and here was a faint sickening indication that fate intended to resolve his doubt into a fatal certainty.

But no: he would not think of it; he would not let it near him; it could not be. He knew he was weak in shrinking as he did, in striving to shut out anything that

might possibly be true—and, therefore, ought to be faced—as he did; but the weakness would have its way, like the fainting of the body, and, for the present time at least, he would put the apprehension from him.

The days and the weeks passed by, and the external state of things remained unchanged at Chayleigh. Uninterrupted friendship, and a certain degree of confidence, were maintained between Margaret and James. The health and spirits of the young widow improved; her friendship with Lady Davyntry remained unimpaired. The correspondence between Eleanor and her brother was frequent and lengthy, and the letters from the Deane were imparted with great frankness by the elder to the younger lady. They were vivid, amusing, and characteristic, and invariably included a message of cordial remembrance to the

household at Chayleigh. Peace of mind was prevalent among all the parties concerned in the little *drame intime* with which we are dealing.

Lady Davyntry's mind was at peace, because she saw that Margaret's interest in Mr. Baldwin's report of his doings at the Deane did not flag ; and, as she said to herself, ' there was no one to interfere with his chances.'

James Dugdale's mind was at peace, because Margaret seemed happier and calmer than he had ever again expected to see her ; and, as Mr. Baldwin remained away, he was not to be feared ; and it was evident that the source of her renewed content was to be found in her present sphere.

Mrs. Carteret's mind was at peace, because Margaret gave her no trouble, and kept herself so quiet, so completely aloof from ' the neighbourhood,' that that noun of

moderate multitude,—having satisfied its curiosity by observing how Mr. Carteret's daughter looked in her 'weeds,'—was content to forget her existence, or ready to condole with Mrs. Carteret upon her step-daughter's strange unsociability, and to compliment the lady upon the contrast in that respect which they presented.

Things had turned out so differently from Mrs. Carteret's first apprehensive anticipations—she had been able to *exploiter* Margaret so successfully; her boasted intimacy at Davyntry had been so complacently indorsed by Lady Davyntry, who would have gone more directly against her conscience even than that to make Margaret's position at home easier—that Mrs. Carteret had almost ceased to wish for Margaret's departure—had even thought casually that it would certainly *look* better, and might possibly *be* better, if she

could be induced to remain at her father's house.

'Perhaps she may settle herself advantageously yet,' Mrs. Carteret—whose ideas were eminently practical—said to herself; and she even thought of consulting James as to whether she had not better suggest such a solution of the problem of the future to Margaret.

Mr. Carteret's mind was at peace, because his mind had never been in any other condition since Godfrey Hungerford's death had restored it to ordinary equilibrium, and because his collections were getting on splendidly.

When Margaret Hungerford had been five months at Chayleigh—when the time was approaching which she had fixed upon as the period at which she would commence her career of labour and independence—when eleven months had elapsed since God-

frey Hungerford's death—when the snows of February lay thick and white upon the earth—an event occurred which disturbed the calm of Chayleigh.

Mrs. Carteret distinguished herself in a most unexpected manner. She caught cold returning from one of the dull dinner-parties which her soul loved, and which no inclemency of weather, or domestic crisis which could be ignored with any decency, would have induced her to forego. A second dinner-party was to come off within three days; so Mrs. Carteret denied the existence of the cold, and attended that solemn festival. That day week she was dead.

CHAPTER XII.

DAWNING.

‘You cannot conceive anything more perfect than the way Margaret is behaving,’ wrote Lady Davyntry to her brother, when the first novelty and shock of Mrs. Carteret’s death had somewhat subsided, ‘in this sad affair. Her conduct to her father is most admirable. He, poor man, is in a wretched state—more, perhaps, of bewilderment than grief, but altogether unhinged.

“‘Master’s put out terrible,” was the account I had from one of the Chayleigh servants, and, odd and horrid as it sounds, I really think that is the best description of

poor Mr. Carteret's state of mind. Anything he is not used to "puts him out," and he is singularly little used to trouble or emotion of any kind.

'He wanders about in a way distressing to behold, and cannot be induced to occupy himself. "There ain't no keeping him in the study," Foster said to me; "and as much as stick a pin in a butterfly, Mr. James nor Miss Margaret can't indoose him to do."

'He seems to have lost all his taste for his specimens, but Margaret has hit upon a great idea for his relief and amusement. This is no other than to talk to her father about the interest which the poor woman who is gone took in his pursuits, and how much she would have regretted his abandonment of them.

'There is a touch of pious fraud in this, for no one can possibly know better than

Margaret that Mrs. Carteret never took any interest in anything but herself, and was rather more indifferent to her husband's pursuits than to any other matters; but the fraud is pious and successful.

‘I have just had a note from her telling me he is more cheerful, and has been watching her dusting specimens this morning. She also says—but, on second thoughts, I enclose the note.

‘With all this, my darling Madge has been very candid and sincere. She has felt the awfulness and the import of the event most deeply, but she has not pretended to a personal sorrow which it is impossible she should feel, and I honour her for that—indeed, I honour her for everything, and love her better every day.

‘Mr. Dugdale has taken Mrs. Carteret's death to heart terribly. She was sincerely

attached to him, I believe, and I fancy he was the only person in the world who loved her, while he managed her perfectly, and quite understood her queer disposition. I have seen very little of him, but Margaret has told me a good deal about him.

‘If you remember, we used to think that he and she did not get on well together—that she did not like him. With all her reserve, Margaret is not difficult to understand; she may keep facts to herself, but she does not disguise feelings, and I am glad to think she and Mr. Dugdale get on nicely now that they are in such responsible charge at Chayleigh.

‘If my letter bores you, my dear Fitz, I really cannot help it, for my head and my heart are both full of Margaret. The Martleys and Forbeses sent a strong contingent down to the funeral, and two of the Martleys stayed a week: very hand-

some young men, not in the least like their sister, who was very much older.

‘I could not help thinking how vexed the poor woman would have been if she could have seen Henry Martley so captivated by her stepdaughter. He fell in love with Margaret with quite old-fashioned celerity, but she calmly ignored him and his love. Mr. Dugdale saw it plainly, and did not like it by any means. They have all had enough of the Martleys, I fancy.

‘The young men took their sister’s death very easily; the eldest was evidently glad to get away; and I cannot be very much surprised or very angry. This event will make a great difference to Margaret. I have always had a presentiment—*I have*, how ever you may laugh—that she would not have to leave Chayleigh. Of course, she cannot think of doing so now; she must remain with her father.

‘Captain Carteret is on his way home. Mr. Dugdale came here yesterday with Margaret for the first time. I believe something was said about his leaving Chayleigh and going back to Oxford, but Mr. Carteret would not hear of it; he clings to Mr. Dugdale more even than to Margaret. So they will settle down together, no doubt. It is a good thing Captain Carteret was not here sooner; the gloom will have pretty well dispersed before he comes.

‘Your account of the Deane is delightful. I think you are quite right not to refurnish the drawing-rooms just yet. Perhaps I might screw up my courage to going there in summer, and then I could choose colours, and so on, for you. You do not really want drawing-rooms at present, and I should not mind anything of the kind if I were you. You may not remain at the Deane long. Indeed, I hope you are

thinking of coming back to me; I want to consult you about such a lot of things; and I hate letter-writing, and explain myself so badly.'

For a lady who hated letter-writing, Lady Davyntry indulged in it a good deal; and, with singular self-denial, devoted herself to keeping her brother thoroughly well informed concerning affairs in the neighbourhood.

She would, priding herself on her astuteness and believing herself inscrutably clever in the performance, send him pages of gossiping details about other people than the dwellers at Chayleigh; she would tell him about the Croftons, the Crokers, and the Willises, about friends in town and friends in foreign parts, whenever it appeared to her that her insistance upon Chayleigh was becoming too marked.

By such artful dodges did she seek to

divert Mr. Baldwin's suspicions that she cherished the profound design of marrying him to her friend.

Her brother, on his part, carefully forbore to point out the inconsistency between her dislike of letter-writing and the frequency of her correspondence. He understood the guileless and amiable Eleanor thoroughly, and smiled over her letters as he thought how charmingly transparent the artifice was, and how easily he could have disposed of it all, had it not precisely coincided with his own wishes.

Time hung heavily on Mr. Baldwin's hands in the midst of his great possessions, and in the presence of his popularity with an assiduous neighbourhood. He had set his heart, he was ready to stake his whole future, upon winning the wearied heart of the pale-faced girl who had brought something into his life which had never been

there before, and the hours and days lingered until the time should come which he had set before himself as fitting for the attempt.

Her first year of widowhood would soon have elapsed, and then he might, without offence, tell her that he loved her. So he named that time, in his own mind, for his return to Davyntry.

When Mrs. Carteret's death occurred, Mr. Baldwin did not alter his plan. The change in Margaret's prospects, the necessity for her remaining with her father, the fact that her sphere of duty was strictly defined now, gave him no uneasiness.

He would never ask her to leave her father. He knew Mr. Carteret well. It did not take much time or pains to acquire that knowledge, and he knew he had no strong attachment to Chayleigh. If he could but persuade Margaret to come and

reign at the Deane, he had no doubt her father would readily go there too.

He had a conviction, which, after all, was not presumptuous for a man of his fortune and station to entertain, that in Margaret's brother he should find a friend. James Dugdale had told him a little of the family history—had given him a vague notion of the part Haldane had taken in the circumstances which had led to Margaret's disastrous marriage; and he felt that the young man would naturally rejoice that such a total change should be wrought in the life of his sister, who had paid so dearly for her imprudence.

A man of peculiarly simple tastes and habits, of unaffected ways of thinking about himself and other people, it rarely occurred to Fitzwilliam Baldwin to take his wealth into account; but he did so now, very reasonably. 'It would not weigh with

her for a minute,' he thought; 'but it will with them, and it will be pleasant to have them all for, and not against, me.'

Life at Chayleigh had settled down again. The delusive appearance of immutability which human affairs assume—human affairs which are but a shifting quicksand—had established itself. The establishment, presided over by Margaret, went on in the ordinary way, the servants highly appreciating the change of *régime*; and Mr. Carteret was beginning to dispose of the days after his old fashion, when Mr. Baldwin returned to Davyntry, and Haldane Carteret arrived at Chayleigh.

The meeting between the brother and sister was frankly affectionate; the renewal of their companionship was delightful to both. Margaret thought her brother wonderfully improved. He was a handsome, manly, soldierly fellow, who had no trace

of likeness to his gentle, studious, feeble father, but whose face, despite its bronzed skin and its thick dark moustache, awakened strange memories in Mr. Carteret's placid breast.

A curious mental phenomenon took place in the experience of Haldane's father. A little while ago, and he was fretting for Mrs. Carteret—if he had said he was wretchedly uncomfortable it would have been a more correct description of his state of mind; but he chose to call himself, to himself, profoundly miserable—and now, since Haldane came home, he had almost forgotten her.

True, he still sat mopingly in his chair, and stared vacantly out of the window, when they left him alone; but the reverie which filled those hours was no longer what it had been. With his son in his bright strong manhood, with his daughter in her

womanhood—early shadowed, indeed, but beautiful—beside him, his heart turned to the past, and a gentle figure, a fair delicate face, long since turned to dust, kept him ghostly company in his solitude.

Margaret was much surprised when, shortly after Haldane's return, Mr. Carteret began to talk to her one day about her mother, and spoke of her with a cheerful freshness of remembrance which she had never supposed him to entertain.

‘The colours she preferred, the books she liked, the places they had visited together, certain fancies she had in her illness—the smallest things, I assure you—is it not wonderful?’ Margaret had asked of Lady Davyntry, as she was telling her this strange circumstance. ‘I never was more surprised, and, I need not say, delighted; I don't think poor Mrs. Carteret's fancies and sayings remain so fresh in his

memory. After so many years, too! The fact is, I don't believe she ever really filled my mother's place at all.'

Margaret was seated on a cushion in the bay of a great window in the drawing-room at Davyntry as she spoke thus. Her heavy bonnet and veil were thrown on the floor beside her, her pale, clear, speaking face, the eyes bright and humid, the lips parted eagerly, and the flickering light, which emotion always diffused over her face, playing on her features. Lady Davyntry stood in the window, and looked down upon her.

'I am sure she never did,' said the impulsive Eleanor; 'how could she? It is all very well for a man to marry again, as your father did, when he has little children, and no one but servants to look after them; but, of course, a second marriage never can be the same thing. All the romance

of life is over, you know, and one knows how much fancy there is in everything ; and, in fact, I can't understand it myself—not for a woman, I mean, who has been happy. A man is different.'

And then Lady Davyntry suddenly discovered that, in proclaiming her general opinion, she was saying exactly the opposite to what she thought in the particular case in which she was most deeply interested, and stopped, very abruptly and awkwardly, and blushing painfully. But Margaret did not seem to perceive her embarrassment. Her hands were pressed together ; her eyes looked out strangely, eagerly ; her words came as though she had no control of them.

' And do you think an unhappy woman—one who has found nothing in her marriage but misery and degradation—one who has nothing of the dreams and fancies of her youth left for retrospection but sicken-

ing deceit and a horrible cheating self-delusion—one who has no good, or pure, or gentle, or upright recollection to cherish of a past which was all a lie, a base infamous lie—do you think a woman with a story like that in her life ought to marry again? Do you think—you, Eleanor, who are truth and honour themselves, and who, I suppose, in all your life never said, or did, or saw, or heard anything for which you have a right to blush or ought to wish to forget—do you think that a woman with a story like that in her life ought to marry? Do you think she ought to link her life to that of any man, however he might love her and pity her, and be prepared to bear with her, while she had to look back upon such a past, however guiltless she might be in it—do you think this, Eleanor? Tell me plainly the truth.'

She put her hand up, and caught one

of her friend's hands in hers. Lady Davyntry still stood and looked at her, and, laying her disengaged hand on her shoulder, answered her passionate question.

‘Do I? Indeed I do, Margaret. Tell me, are you asking me this for yourself? Are you asking me if I think, because you have had the least-deserved misfortune to have been the wife of a bad man, and you have been released from him, you are to carry the chain in fancy which has been taken off you in reality? It's unlike you; it is morbid to ask, to think of such a thing. What are you but a young girl still? Are you to do penance all your life for the sins of another? No, no, Margaret; silent as you are about your past, you are asking me this question in reference to yourself. Is it not so? Do not place a half-confidence in me. Do not let a delusion like this take possession of your

mind, and blight your future as your past has been blighted.'

'There is nothing in my question,' said Margaret, drawing her hand away from Lady Davyntry, and rising; 'nothing in the sense you mean. My future seems plain and clear enough now. My place in the world is fixed, I fancy; but sometimes, Eleanor, sometimes the past, of which I have never spoken to you, of which I cannot speak, comes back to me, not only in its own dreadful shape, but with a dim undefined threat in it, and makes me afraid. You don't understand me; well for you that you do not. I trust you never may.'

She picked up her bonnet and tied it on, and was folding her shawl round her, while Lady Davyntry stood by, longing to speak out all that was in her mind, and yet fearing to damage her own hopes by doing so and learning the worst, when the

door opened, and Haldane Carteret and Mr. Baldwin came into the room.

Margaret was standing with her back towards the door, and facing a mirror, in which Lady Davyntry saw her face reflected. It was startlingly pale, and there was a wild look of pain in the eyes, quite other than sadness — sometimes a little stern—which was their usual expression.

Lady Davyntry could hardly reply to the cheery greeting of Haldane, so much was she struck by Margaret's change of countenance. Margaret spoke hurriedly to Mr. Baldwin. The only one of the four who did not know that there was a consciousness on the part of all the others that something unusual had taken place was Haldane.

‘I have come to fetch you home, Madge,’ he said, ‘and then I’m going out for a ride with Baldwin, and we dine with the Crof-

tons, so you won't see much of me to-day. Are you ready ?'

'Quite ready,' said Margaret; and she kissed Lady Davyntry, and took so hurried a leave of her that her friend had not time to ask her a question. She was about to give Mr. Baldwin her hand, and bid him good-bye too, but he said he was going their way—his horses might be taken to Chayleigh.

When she was left alone, Lady Davyntry tried to disentangle her impressions of what had occurred. At last she thought she saw the meaning of it all. Margaret had found out Mr. Baldwin's not-carefully-preserved secret, even as she (Eleanor) had found it out, and she loved him. Yes, his sister was sure of it. She had all the acuteness which keen feeling and true sympathy give, and which is truer in emergencies than that of mere intellectual cle-

verness, and she knew that a sharp and severe struggle was raging in the young widow's heart.

She understood it all now—she understood that Margaret shrank from the avowal to herself that she had learned to love and trust again, that she had not been able to carry out the expiatory process which she had resolved—the process of loneliness and labour of self-repression, and the abnegation of the true happiness to be had even in this world, because she had been beguiled by the false. She understood that Margaret, however believing and trusting in Fitzwilliam Baldwin's love, would feel that there was no equality between them, and that the serene and beautiful fancies of a happy girl were not for her, while all the illusion and gladness of life's early days still were his. Intuitively Lady Davyntry understood it all; the face she had seen in

the glass, when her brother's entrance had surprised Margaret in one of her rare moments of emotion, had made it all plain to her.

‘She will refuse him,’ Eleanor thought; ‘she will refuse him. These two, the most suited to one another, the best calculated to be happy of any people I ever knew—the very ideal of a well-matched pair—will be kept apart by a chimera. So the evil of that vile man’s life lives after him, and he has the power to make her and others miserable, though he is in his grave. Shall I speak openly to Fitzwilliam? I cannot do harm now. No man could be more bent upon anything than he is on marrying Margaret. I may as well let him know—if, indeed, he has not guessed it—how much I wish it too.’

Lady Davyntry’s nature, like her brother’s, was essentially sunny and cheerful;

so she soon roused herself from the depression her discovery had caused her.

‘If she does refuse him,’ thought Eleanor, after long cogitating with herself, ‘she cannot refuse to tell him why. She is too sincere—she will not deny that she loves him, and then she will be persuaded out of this morbid fancy by degrees. After all, it will only be a case of waiting. I must have patience, and Fitzwilliam must have patience too. Margaret is worth waiting for. I shall see her at the Deane yet.’

It was a source of great satisfaction to Lady Davyntry to remember that Margaret was settled at Chayleigh, that Mr. Baldwin need not fear her removal—that, in fact, he had every external advantage on his side.

‘How strangely things happen!’ she thought. ‘Really, it seems as if that poor woman’s death were quite providential. If

she had lived, I don't see how Margaret could have possibly stayed at Chayleigh; and now she cannot get away. Even if she had remained, she could not have been in such a pleasant and independent position.'

And then Lady Davyntry, who possessed in perfection the fine feminine facility for looking at every subject from exclusively her own point of view, came to the comfortable conclusion that poor Mrs. Carteret's death was 'all for the best.'

Haldane Carteret retained all his boyish affection for James Dugdale. His old tutor loved him, too, better than any one in the world save Margaret; and the young man's sojourn at home was a bright spot in the life of the older man, whose life had in it very little brightness. All that James knew of Margaret's story he had told Hal-

dane by letter, and now the subject was but rarely revived between them.

Haldane was not a very acute observer. He rarely troubled himself with the reflective part of life; he had bright animal spirits, good health, and was now of an active temperament very different from the promise of his boyhood. The experiment of letting him follow his military inclinations had turned out admirably. His father was very fond of him, very proud of him, and kept out of his way as much as possible. His presence had the best possible effect on Margaret, who was beginning to bloom again, not only with the roses, but with the spirits of her girlish days.

Haldane was immensely delighted with Mr. Baldwin. It was a new experience to him that a man of such large fortune, such assured position, such high intellectual attainments, still young and flattered by the

world, should be of so unworldly a spirit, so pure of heart and life, and so entirely unassuming. In modern parlance, Mr. Baldwin was an undeniable 'swell,' but he never seemed to remember the circumstance except when an act of generosity, or the exercise of privilege in the cause of good, was required.

'I'll tell you what, Dugdale,' Haldane Carteret said to his old friend as they strolled together in the fields by the clump of beeches which Margaret had said she hated, 'there are not many such fellows going as Baldwin!'

James Dugdale heartily concurred in his companion's estimate of Baldwin.

'Knocking about the world teaches a fellow to appreciate a man like that,' continued Haldane. 'It's very strange to remember how one has been taken in by people. There was that ruffian Hunger-

ford, for instance. By the bye,'—and Haldane stood still, and looked into James's face to make his words more emphatic,—'I think Baldwin is uncommonly attentive to Madge, don't you?'

'N-no,' said James hesitatingly; 'I can't say I noticed anything of the kind.'

'Look out, then, and you will notice it. You're not an observing person, you know—not a lady's man exactly—neither am I; but I think I know the symptoms of that sort of thing when I see them; and I don't think Baldwin is staying at Davyntry altogether on account of his sister. I say, James, what a grand thing it would be, wouldn't it?'

'What a grand thing *what* would be?' asked Dugdale in an impatient tone.

'If Madge likes him, and he likes her, and they make a match of it. It would be a fine marriage for any girl, and it would

be a great thing to have all the past put out of her mind. Fate owes her a good turn, poor girl!

And James? Did not Fate owe him a good turn? If so, he thought sadly, the debt was not likely to be paid. The change in Margaret's manner, the increased frankness, the ready kindness she showed him now, had ceased to bring him any happiness. He did not deceive himself now as to its source.

He was nothing more to her than he had ever been; but, instead of the old bitterness, a root of sweetness was springing up in her heart, and its natural outcome was the oblivion of her former feelings, the remission of all past and gone offences from those who would but be doubly indifferent to her under the influence of this new motive in her life.

For a time James Dugdale yielded to

the weakness which this new keen suffering produced. He felt that life had been always bitter for him—there was no mercy, no gentleness in it at all.

When he looked at Margaret and noted the change in her face—saw how the light had come back into the eyes, the roundness to the clear pale cheeks, the softness to the square brow and the small lips, and interpreted the change aright, notwithstanding the fits of heavy sadness which still came over her—he would feel very tired of life. Impossible not to envy the lot which was never to be his—the destiny of those who are dowered with love.

Never to be, never to have been, the first object in life to any one is a melancholy fate, he would think—one for which no general affection, or appreciation, not even the most intoxicating gift of fame, could ever compensate.

This was his lot, and he knew it, and did not attempt to persuade himself that it was not very hard and bitter to submit to. After a time he should be able to look at the matter from the unselfish point of view of Margaret's happiness; but not yet. He had never quite realised the nature and extent of his own fears, until Haldane's words had put the truth before him in the airy and cheerful manner related. Of course he was right; of course it would be a 'great match,' and a 'fine thing;' of course it would be the most complete reparation of all that Fate had wrought against Margaret—the most total reverse of her life which could be devised.

The love of such a man—as James, rigidly just in all his pain, acknowledged Fitzwilliam Baldwin to be—had in itself such elements of dignity and honour, such power of rehabilitation for the wounded

spirit of the woman he loved, that it was an act of utter oblivion.

From the unassailable height of her position, as Mr. Baldwin's wife, Margaret might look down upon the pigmy cares of coarse remark and prying curiosity, as on all the sordid and common anxieties of material life from which she had once suffered so keenly.

He knew all this — he who would, he believed, have suffered anything in the cause of her welfare. Yes, and so he would, anything but just the thing he was appointed to suffer; and he could not bring himself to bear it, not yet. He forgot how he had acknowledged, when she returned to Chayleigh, that she could not continue to live there, that the dead level of life there would be intolerable to her who had breathed the atmosphere of storm and been tossed on the waves of trouble. She was

too young to find refuge in calm; the peace which is the paradise of age which has suffered, is the prison of suffering youth.

He knew all this, and yet he murmured against the destiny that was going to release her, without penalty or price—that was going to crown her life with happiness. He murmured, he revolted, he raged; and then he submitted, as we all must, to everything.

From this state of feeling to an intense longing to know the truth, to have it all over and done with—to be quite certain that Margaret had put the old life from her, and with it all the ties which existed between her and him; that she was going into a sphere in which he could have no place—was a natural transition for James Dugdale's feverish, sensitive temperament.

He watched Margaret and her friend;

he understood Lady Davyntry's feelings perfectly, and owed her no grudge for them; he rather honoured her as more large-minded and disinterested than most women. Of course she coveted such a prize as Margaret for her brother. To the rich, treasures, was the judgment and the way of the world.

He watched Margaret and her lover. Yes, her lover—he forced himself to give him that kingly title in his thoughts, and he thought, he knew, he hoped it might soon come—that suspense, at least, would be over, and nothing would remain for him but to accustom himself to the new order of things.

Full of these thoughts, he sought Margaret, one beautiful day in May, in the pleasaunce. He had seen her walking on the lawn. She had exchanged a few sentences with him as she passed the windows

of Mr. Carteret's study, where James was sitting, and he had promised to join her presently, when her father released him. He was anxious to tell her that he had heard again from Hayes Meredith. When he joined her he held a letter in his hand.

‘Papa has been bothering you about those dreadful bats, hasn't he, James?’ asked Margaret with a smile; ‘I will take my turn at them this afternoon.’

‘O no,’ he said; ‘but I wanted to see you before you went out, because I have a letter from Melbourne.’

She changed colour slightly, and glanced nervously at the letter.

‘It is very short. Meredith merely says he cannot come to England, or send his son for some time—not for a year, indeed. There is a money difficulty out there, and Mrs. Meredith is in delicate health.’

‘Indeed! I am sorry for that. So mas-

ter Robert must put up with colonial life for a little longer.'

'Yes,' replied James; 'and I am not sorry. The longer my responsibility as regards that young gentleman is deferred the better. Still, I should like to see Meredith. Shouldn't you, Margaret?

'No,' she said quickly, and in a tone of decision, 'I should not, James. Not because I am ungrateful—no, indeed—but because anything, any one connected with that dreadful time I would shun by any lawful means. You don't know how I dread any mention of it, how I shrink from any thought of it. You don't—you can't—it is like a curse from which I never can escape. If'—she continued vehemently—'if Hayes Meredith came into this house, if any one from that place came, I should feel it was an evil omen—I should be sure it could only be to bring me misery. Very

superstitious, very wrong, very weak,—is it not, James?—I know; but it is perfectly true, and stronger than I—'

She shuddered as she spoke, and was quite pale now.

James looked at her in agitated surprise, and put the letter, which she had made no motion to take from him, into his pocket.

At that moment the footman approached them, coming from the house.

James glanced at Margaret's white face and tearful eyes, and went forward to intercept the servant before he should be near enough to discover them also.

'A letter from Davyntry, for Mrs. Hungerford, sir,' said the man.

'Is there any answer required?'

'I don't know, sir.'

James brought the letter—a very thick one—to Margaret.

‘Just open this,’ he said, ‘and see if there’s an answer.’

She broke the seal of the envelope, which was directed in Lady Davyntry’s hand, and drew out, not a letter from her friend, but a second sealed envelope, with her name upon it. The writing was well known to her; it was Mr. Baldwin’s. The outer cover fell to the ground, as she stood with the enclosure in her hand, James looking at her and at it.

‘There’s—there’s no answer,’ she said. She had not made the slightest attempt to open the missive.

James Dugdale delivered the message to the servant, who went back to the house, and then he turned away down another path and struck into the fields.

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